

Few pages in the history of discovery present a more dramatic appeal than those describing the long British quest for the Northwest Passage. The expeditions of the eighteenth century hold an important place for they represent the final revival of hope that the passage would provide a short, easily navigable trade route to the Orient.

The expeditions which left England in this century were mainly prompted by the same motives of commercial exploration that had sent Frobisher, Hudson, Baffin and other early navigators to the north; but their instructions were based on the controversial maps constructed by the geographical theorists of their own day, men who undertook intensive publicity campaigns to win the support of statesmen and merchants for their ventures. Ships were fitted out by the Admiralty, the Hudson's Bay Company and private individuals; some were commanded by obscure figures whose careers are here described for the first time, others by navigators as famous as James Cook and George Vancouver; but all, whether they searched in Hudson Bay or along the distant shores of Northwest America, failed in their efforts to find the elusive strait.

By the end of the century it was clear that there was no passage south of the Arctic Circle, and that if a passage existed at all, it would not be navigable for sailing ships. The vision of a great trade route to the East faded, but the sufferings of these adventurous seamen were not in vain. Their reports pointed the way north for the explorers of the nineteenth century who sought a passage, and their surveys opened the almost unknown northwest coast of America to trade and settlement.

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Rhodes Professor of Imperial History in the University of London

*The British Search for the
Northwest Passage in the
Eighteenth Century*

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Section of Carte des Nouvelles Découvertes au Nord de la Mer du Sud.
P. Buache, 1752

The British Search for the Northwest Passage in the Eighteenth Century

GLYNDWR WILLIAMS



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TO MY FATHER
AND THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER

WALTER W. THOMAS, JR. 1911-1981

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This volume is published with the help of a
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ABBREVIATIONS

Adm *Admiralty Records, Public Record Office.*

ADM *Admiralty Records, National Maritime Museum.*

B.M.Add.MSS. *Additional Manuscripts, British Museum.*

B.M.Eg.MSS. *Egerton Manuscripts, British Museum.*

C.O. *Colonial Office Records, Public Record Office.*

HBC *Hudson's Bay Company.*

S.P. *State Papers, Public Record Office.*

NOTES

Dates prior to 1 January 1752 are given in Old Style, except that the year is taken to begin on 1 January, not 25 March.

Until 1805 nautical time differed from civil time in that the twenty-four hour day extended from noon to noon, not midnight to midnight. Thus, entries for 8 December in a seaman's log would cover the afternoon and evening of 8 December (civil time) and the morning of 9 December (civil time). To avoid confusion, civil time has been used throughout in the text of this book; but when references have been given in the footnotes to log or journal entries, the date of the original has been adhered to. There is consequently an occasional one-day discrepancy between a date in the text and that given in an accompanying footnote.

P R E F A C E

As the first grey light of an Arctic dawn spread across the snow-covered landscape of Banks Island one morning in late October 1850, a party of British sailors led by Commander M'Clure gazed from its vantage point high on the island in latitude $73^{\circ} 30' N.$, and saw stretching away to the east the frozen waters of Melville Sound. M'Clure's ship had come through Bering Strait from the Pacific; Melville Sound had been discovered thirty years earlier by Parry, forcing his way through the ice westward from Baffin Bay. After almost three hundred years of endeavour the Northwest Passage had at last been found; but the route painfully traced by the naval expeditions of the nineteenth century was not the passage sought by earlier explorers. Their vision had been, not of tortuous, ice-choked channels impassable for sailing ships, but of an easily navigable strait in temperate latitudes through which merchantmen would pass on their way between Europe and the shimmering lands of the East. The dream persisted as late as 1790, and the primary concern of this book is to explain and follow to its conclusion the revival of hope in the eighteenth century that a short trade route to the Pacific might yet be found.

Zeal for the search in those years was not constant, and unsuccessful expeditions were invariably followed by periods of disillusionment; but always hope and enthusiasm mounted again. To account for this phenomenon, and also to show why for the first time serious efforts were made to discover the Pacific entrance of the passage, a study of the geographical theories of the time is essential. A considerable part of this book is devoted to such an examination, and to the role of the publicists in England (for the Hakluys, Dees and Gilberts of an earlier age had their counterparts in the eighteenth century) who brought these theories to the notice of statesmen and merchants. With the eastern entrance of the passage thought to lie in Hudson Bay, it was inevitable that the chartered company which held monopolistic rights over the trade of that region should be closely connected with the search, and the attitude of the Hudson's Bay Company towards attempts to find the passage, as well as its

own efforts to make the discovery, are considered along with the expeditions sent by the Admiralty and private subscribers in quest of the passage.

This book would not be possible in its present form were it not for the permission given me by the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company to inspect and copy documents and maps in the Company archives at Beaver House, London; and this permission has been made the more valuable by the help of the Company archivist, Miss A. M. Johnson, and her assistants Miss M. A. Gambols and Miss G. Kemp. My thanks are due also to the staffs of the Public Record Office, the British Museum, the National Maritime Museum, the Library of the Royal Society, the India Office Library, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the Institute of Historical Research; and I should like in particular to express my gratitude to Mr E. K. Timings of the Public Record Office, and to Mr R. A. Skelton, Superintendent of the Map Room of the British Museum, for the help they have given me. Mr Desmond Clarke, Librarian of the Royal Dublin Society, lent me photostat copies of the letters of Arthur Dobbs preserved among the Castle Ward Papers in the possession of Edward Ward, 7th Viscount Bangor. Professor E. E. Rich was good enough to read several chapters of the first draft of my London PhD thesis on the Northwest Passage in 1957 and 1958, and has always been ready to put his unrivalled knowledge of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company at my disposal. Dr J. C. Beaglehole kindly read my chapters on Cook's third voyage, and commented on them at some length. My colleague Mr M. H. Port read the whole of the book in page proof. Miss E. M. J. Campbell gave freely of her time and advice in connection with the maps, which were drawn by Miss M. Black, Mrs K. King and Mr D. G. C. Judd. My wife typed part of the final draft, and helped in many other ways.

My deepest obligation is to the editor of the Imperial Studies Series, Professor G. S. Graham. My debt to him began to mount when I was an undergraduate, and as a result of his many kindnesses has now reached considerable proportions. Any merits which this work possesses stem mainly from his advice and encouragement. Finally, I am grateful to the Royal Commonwealth Society for publishing this book, the opinions expressed in which are entirely my responsibility.

Queen Mary College,
London.

G.W.

INTRODUCTION

By the early decades of the sixteenth century the merchants and geographers of Europe were aware that the lands discovered across the Atlantic were part, not of Marco Polo's Cathay, but of a great land-mass that barred the way to the countries of spices, precious stones and fine silks. To find a passage through or around this obstacle became the aim of the seamen of several nations. In Central America the Spaniards impatiently sought an opening through which their vessels could pass safely and swiftly to the lands of Asia, but the only strait found was that far to the south, named after its discoverer Magellan. To the north Jacques Cartier ranged as far as Newfoundland, and discovered the St Lawrence river: yet he found no strait to the west, and for the next two centuries French endeavours to reach the Pacific were confined to the rivers and lakes of the interior. Farther north still lay the unknown and desolate regions of ice, and it was there that English seamen sought the route to the South Sea that they called the Northwest Passage.

Although in the reign of Henry VIII the Bristol merchant Robert Thorne urged the government to send expeditions north and northwest to discover a passage, English voyages of exploration were comparatively few and unimportant until the last quarter of the sixteenth century. But then the search for a route to the Pacific that was not dominated by the Spaniards or Portuguese began in earnest, and for sixty years English navigators explored and charted long stretches of the bleak coastline of northeast America, penetrating far to the west along ice-bound straits and channels in quest of the South Sea. Support for the ventures came from government, nobles and merchants alike; for all were conscious of the advantages which the discovery of a short trade route to the East would bring. From China, Japan and the East Indies would come goods by a quicker and cheaper route than the long haul around the Cape or overland to the Levant, and direct trade with those little-known regions would open new markets to English manufactures.

The first voyages in this period of intensive Arctic exploration

were made by Martin Frobisher, who in 1576 sailed across the entrance of Hudson Strait and on to Frobisher Bay, which he assumed was the entrance to the passage. His next two expeditions were diverted from exploration to treasure-seeking, and it was left to John Davis to take up the search by exploring the strait that now bears his name. There he was stopped by ice, but in the reign of James I hopes of a passage once more rose high after Hudson's tragic final voyage through Hudson Strait and into Hudson Bay, because the survivors reported that in the Bay they had encountered a strong tide from the west. However, expeditions under Thomas Button and William Baffin could not find a way through Hudson Bay into the Pacific, and in 1616 Baffin sailed through Davis Strait and along the shores of Baffin Bay without finding an outlet to the west. For the first time, there was a perceptible slackening of interest, and although Foxe and James sailed to Hudson Bay in 1631, neither found a passage. Foxe, it is true, considered that there were indications of a strait in the unexplored northwest corner of the Bay, but the years of failure had brought disillusionment to enthusiasts in England. A succession of costly expeditions had found no route to Asia, nor had the explorers been compensated for their disappointments by the discovery of gold.

Not until after the Restoration did another English ship enter Hudson Bay, and although in 1668 the captain of the *Nonsuch* was ordered 'to have in yo^r thoughts the discovery of the Passage into the South sea and to attempt it as occasion shall offer', the main purpose of the expedition was to trade for furs. In 1670 the promoters of the venture were granted a charter, and the energies of the young Hudson's Bay Company were devoted almost entirely to developing the fur trade. Permanent posts were established along the southern shores of Hudson Bay, but there was little exploration either inland or along the coast to the northwest, and no attempt was made to renew the search for a passage. To the Governor and Committee in London the matters of most concern were the supply of furs, the risks of the yearly voyages by the Company ships between England and Hudson Bay, and the danger of French raids on the Bay posts. The Northwest Passage was forgotten, and for the rest of the century men in the Bay and in England were preoccupied with the hard facts of trade and profits.

James Knight and the Strait of Anian

DURING the wars of the League of Augsburg and the Spanish Succession the Hudson's Bay Company suffered severe losses from French depredations in the Bay, and it was some years after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 had restored its former possessions before it was able to regain stability and look forward to a period of modest affluence. The dominant figure in the Bay during the immediate post-war period was James Knight, an imperious veteran who had first entered the Company's service in 1676 as a shipwright, had risen to the position of factor in charge of one of the Bay posts, and had later served on the Committee in London. In the summer of 1713 he was appointed Governor in Hudson Bay, and received the surrender of York Fort from the French the next year.¹ Deputy Governor in the Bay was Henry Kelsey, who as a youth had penetrated far inland to the Saskatchewan and wintered on the prairies. His subsequent career had been less spectacular, but he was a capable and energetic factor.

Although Knight had not been in Hudson Bay since 1700, and at the time of his appointment as Governor was sixty or seventy years old, he showed remarkable vigour in re-establishing the Company's position at York, and in building a new post farther

¹ Knight's service with the Company up to 1714 is summarized by J. F. Kenney in his introduction to *The Founding of Churchill Being the Journal of Captain James Knight, Governor-in-Chief in Hudson Bay, from the 14th of July to the 13th of September, 1717* (Toronto, 1932), pp. 23-48. Knight's position as Governor in Hudson Bay was distinct from, and subordinate to, that of Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company—a position held at this time, and for a further thirty years, by Sir Bibye Lake. Responsibility for Company policy and administration rested with the Governor, Deputy Governor and a Committee of seven in London, who were elected by the stockholders each November at the annual General Court. This controlling body of nine men is hereafter referred to simply as the Committee.

north at Churchill. The journals he kept during the strenuous years of hardship and achievement that followed his arrival in the Bay in 1714 contain, besides the routine accounts of daily events, detailed explanations of his plans and hopes regarding the expansion of Company trade and the discovery of the Northwest Passage. To Knight that elusive strait promised a way to a land of treasure, an El Dorado on the Pacific coast of North America, rumours about which had reached him in England,¹ and prompted him to take to York 'Cruseables, Melting Potts, Borax &c for the Trial of Minerals'.² The search for mineral wealth finally became an obsession which led the old Governor to his death, but his first years in the Bay were fully occupied restoring the fort at York and renewing trade contacts with the Indians who hunted beaver. He worked assiduously for peace among the warring tribes, and in 1715 sent one of his men, William Stewart, with a party of Home Indians to negotiate a treaty with the distant Northern Indians, and 'make a Strict Enquiry ab^t there Mineralls'.³ In the summer of 1716 Stewart and his Indians returned, and as proof of the success of their mission brought with them a group of Northern Indians to be trained as interpreters.

Knight eagerly examined the strange Indians, and found in their stories ample confirmation of his hopes. Day after day he questioned them, and as he entered their answers in his journal he grew convinced that 'the charge as I have been at to bring this Peace to pass is the best layd out of any as ever was in the NW^t', for all those he examined told of a river along whose banks lay 'great Quantitys of pure Virgin Copper lumps of it so bigg that three or 4 Men cant lift it'.⁴ This was the first mention

¹ York Journal, 12 July 1716. HBC B 239/a/2, f. 44v.

² Committee Minutes, 1 June 1714. HBC A 1/33, f. 97v.

³ Instructions to William Stewart, 27 June 1715. HBC B 239/a/1, f. 43v.
Home Indians was the term given to the Crees who lived near the Company posts, and hunted for the garrisons. The Northern Indians were the Chipewyan, a tribe which extended westward from Churchill to Lake Athabaska and the Great Slave Lake. See Diamond Jenness, *The Indians of Canada* (National Museum of Canada Bulletin No. 65, 4th edn., Ottawa, 1958), pp. 283-4, 385.

⁴ York Journal, 8 May, 12 July 1716. HBC B 239/a/2, ff. 28r, 45r.

of that northern river where copper abounded which was to attract the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company until Hearne solved the mystery half a century later, but to Knight the possibility of a prosaic if profitable trade in copper was only a lucrative sideline: 'that is not Still what I am Endeavouring to gett or Endeavour to Discover thare is a Parcell of Indians as lyes upon the west Seas as has a Yellow Mettle as they make use of as these do Copper'.¹ This metal, Knight concluded, was gold; and for the few remaining years of his life he was absorbed in the search for it.

It was clear to the Governor that the quickest way to reach this land of gold on the west coast of America was by sea, and it became a matter of urgency for him to find the answer to those questions which geographers had asked for centuries: was there a strait separating Asia and America, and if so, could it, and the northwest coast of America, be reached from the Atlantic? Unlike explorers in search of a passage twenty and thirty years later, Knight had no delusions about the width of the North American continent in high latitudes. Stewart had journeyed, according to his own reckoning, a thousand miles in a northwesterly direction, and although Knight believed this to be an over-estimate, he fully realized the great distance to be covered: 'I know it is 1500 Miles Cross from Sea to Sea'.² No European could cover such an expanse to trade, and only two alternatives remained. Knight could try to persuade Indians to bring the precious metal overland to the fort—at best an unreliable method—or he could attempt to trade direct by ship. The question of a passage, therefore, was of the utmost importance, and as he cross-examined the Indians Knight's hopes rose and fell almost from day to day:

I could not hear by them that thare is any Straights that parts Asia from America.

... from there Discourse I begin to think there may be a Passage or Straits that parts America from Asia.

¹ York Journal, 8 May 1716. *Ibid.*, f. 28v.

² York Journal, 12 July 1716. *Ibid.*, f. 45r.

... can here of no Passage or Streights that cutts through between America and Asia.¹

From his post on the shores of Hudson Bay Knight was probing into the unknown, for this was a period of complete ignorance about the northwest coast of America. No explorers had touched the coast above latitude 43° N., and Bering had not yet discovered the strait that later bore his name. On most maps the vast region between Hudson Bay and the dimly-known lands of eastern Asia was simply marked *incognita*, and Knight was almost entirely dependent on Indian information. From the rough maps the strange Indians drew for him he learnt that there were seventeen rivers along the coast north of Churchill, and that the seventeenth and largest river might well be the passage itself. He was also told that the fourteenth river, the Copper River, ran into the western ocean; and this information seemed to be confirmed by an Indian who maintained that he had been in the country of the Copper Indians,² and had ventured so far down a great river that he met the tide from the sea. There he had seen a large bay, and three islands where the Indians lived who brought the yellow metal across to the mainland, and who wore it as other natives did copper. This bay lay far to the north, but Knight was convinced that it was open to shipping because he was told that the inhabitants

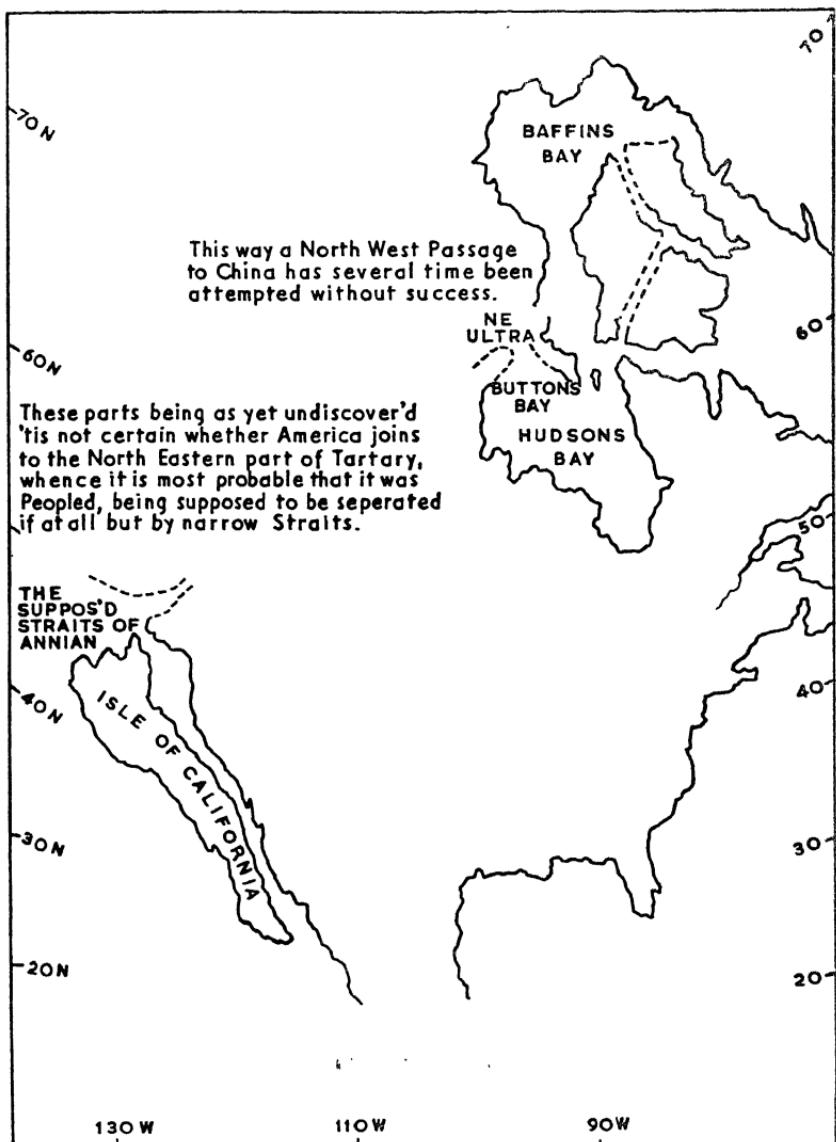
every Summer see Sev^{ll} Ships in the Western Seas w^{ch} I cannott think to be Spaniards . . . I rather take them to be Tartars or Jappanees Vessells and they see 'em go to Some great Islands that lyes within Sight of the Land and that there is very little Ice in them Seas in the Winter and these Northern Indians that was with me this Spring does assure me that great Wood does grow all along the Westland Country and that shows there is an open Sea that it is not so cold as the East part of America.³

Knight was interpreting the reports he collected in the light

¹ York Journal, 10, 12, 29 May 1716. *Ibid.*, ff. 30r, 31v, 34r.

² The Copper Indians were the Yellowknives, a tribe with similar characteristics to the Chipewyan, but who lived farther north in the vicinity of the Great Bear Lake and the Coppermine River. Jenness, *Indians of Canada*, pp. 388-9.

³ York Journal, 12 July 1716. HBC B 239/a/2, f. 45r.



North America: after J. Senex 1725

of his own preconceived theories. Much of the Indian information might have been of value if viewed in its true context. The 'sea' of the Indians, which Knight presumed was the Pacific, was probably Great Slave Lake. The large rivers they described were no doubt the Slave, Mackenzie and Coppermine rivers, and the reports of strange vessels (if not entirely apocryphal) could have come from the Californian coast, or even the Gulf of Mexico. The yellow metal might have been any one of a half-dozen ores from the rich mineral deposits of the northwest. It was not only Knight who listened eagerly and uncritically to Indian tales; other Europeans had been similarly misled. A French officer, Nicolas Jérémie, spent many years in Hudson Bay during the French occupation of York Fort in the Marlborough wars, and in 1720 published an account of his experiences. Like Knight, he was keenly interested in the geography of the surrounding region, and repeated the information given him by Indians about a strait which ran from Hudson Bay to the western sea. Along the shores of that sea, Jérémie had been told, bearded white men from ships gathered gold.¹ Farther south French explorers of the interior were often excited by Indian reports about the country to the west; reports of white men, gold, shining mountains, a great sea, and a westward flowing river. In some of these rumours there were elements of truth, but other tales can be explained only by the known tendency of the Indian to concoct stories for explorers or traders in the hope of reward. And the more imaginative among the Northern Indians who accompanied Stewart on his long journey back to York in 1716 were not disappointed when they reached the fort, for Knight was pathetically eager to glean any scrap of information about their country; and more than thirty years later one of his men who was with him when he interrogated the Indians about the mines of gold and copper still remembered how the Governor 'was very earnest in this Discovery, which was always

¹ Nicolas Jérémie, *Twenty Years of York Factory 1694-1714. Jérémie's Account of Hudson Strait and Bay*, translated from the French edition of 1720 with notes and introduction by R. Douglas and J. N. Wallace (Ottawa, 1926), p. 21.

his Topic, and he took all Opportunities of making Presents to the Natives'.¹

By July 1716 Knight had added silver and pearls to the mines of gold and the river of copper, and as he brooded over ways and means of reaching this treasure lamented his 'great Oversight' in lending a Committee member his book of northern explorations before leaving England, since it was never returned and, he explained in his journal, 'I must now make all the Discoverys in the dark for want of it'.² At this time Knight was still pondering whether the gold and copper could be best obtained 'by trade or a Vessel', and only after the failure of overland trade contacts did he turn to an expedition by sea. The first step in his plan was the construction of a fort at the mouth of the Churchill river north of York, where a post had been built in 1689 only to be destroyed by fire a few months later. Accordingly, in the fall of 1716 he instructed the Northern Indians at York to tell their countrymen that a trading post was to be built at Churchill, and that they should bring copper and furs there. But Knight's last winter at York was exceptionally hard, and bedevilled by the lack of food and shortage of trading goods he watched the Northern Indians die one by one. The journal for the winter months became an unending catalogue of misfortune as the sick and distracted Governor saw his plans collapsing with the deaths of the Indians, and although two out of the original band of fifteen survived, and accompanied the advance party to Churchill, the most valuable member of the party died. This was a slavewoman who before her capture by the Northern Indians had been a chief's wife in the land of the distant Crow Indians, where she claimed to have seen and handled the yellow metal which came from the islands off the west coast. She promised that when she got to Churchill she would bring in the trade of the nearby Indians, and also go with her brother to the country where the

¹ *Report from the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State and Conditions of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, and of the Trade carried on there* (London, 1749), p. 49. This will be referred to hereafter as *Parliamentary Report, 1749*.

² York Journal, 12 May 1716. HBC B 239/a/2, f. 31v.

gold was found, making peace and trading on the way.¹ At the beginning of February 1717 she died, and many of Knight's hopes were snuffed out.

One faint gleam remained, for two years earlier Knight had sent an Indian named Swan far to the west to make peace with the Indian tribes. In June 1717 he returned, but with frustrating news. Although he claimed to have reached those Indians whose country was bordered by the western ocean he had made few enquiries among them, because one of the inhabitants promised to return with him. But after three months this man left Swan's party and went back to his own country. The length of time Swan had been away, and the death of the slavewoman, finally put an end to any expectation Knight had of reaching the tribes of the Pacific coast by land. The only alternative was to sail through the strait reported by the Indians, and after Knight arrived at Churchill in August 1717 he sent an apprentice, Richard Norton, into Northern Indian country to explore and bring the Indians down to trade.² Knight's journal covers only his first two months at Churchill, and so contains no mention of the report the adventurous Norton made on his return in December, nor any indication of Knight's own plans, but it is possible that Norton brought back information about the deep opening on the west coast of the Bay, later discovered and named Chesterfield Inlet. Certainly the despairing mood of that last grim winter at York, when the Governor had entered in his journal 'I thank God my time is out Next Year and then I hope I never shall be more Exposd in this Country',³ had passed; for after his return home in the autumn of 1718 Knight laid far-reaching proposals before the London Committee and sailed for the Bay again the next summer, this time in quest of the Northwest Passage.

Knight's proposals were formally considered by the Com-

¹ See A. M. Johnson, 'Ambassadress of Peace', *The Beaver* (Dec. 1952), pp. 42-5.

² Churchill Journal, 18 July 1717. HBC B 239/a/3, f. 68v. *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, p. 49. ³ York Journal, 5 March 1717. HBC 239/a/3, f. 33r.

mittee on 20 March 1719, when it was decided that a sub-committee should be set up to examine them;¹ but the fact that ships bound for Hudson Bay had to leave England by the beginning of June if they were to pass through Hudson Strait when it was clear of ice, makes it probable that Knight had raised the question of an expedition before this date.² An entry in the Committee minute book dated 6 February referring to a forty ton sloop then under construction as being 'for Discovery's' would seem to corroborate this assumption, and the vessel, named the *Discovery* in April, sailed with Knight that summer on her only voyage. Knight at this time was no longer a Company servant, for his contract had ended and he returned to England, not as Governor Knight, but as a time-expired servant, bearing merely the honorary title of Captain. The wording of the various entries concerning his proposals in the minute book suggests that he was an independent agent driving a hard bargain, rather than an employee, however distinguished, laying a proposition before the Company for acceptance or rejection. Although the sub-committee was set up on 20 March, and time did not permit leisurely negotiations, it did not report until 24 April when it mentioned several meetings with Knight, but only 'some progress towards an agreement with him'.³ It was hoped to complete negotiations that same afternoon, but the agreement for 'Capt James Knight to goe upon Discovery' was not signed for another week. Although this contract, eventually signed and sealed on 1 May, has never come to light, one of the Company account books contains a brief but informative entry about it:

Capt James Knight Dr to Stock £142 : 3 : 1 being his proportion of $\frac{1}{8}$ part of The Cargo and fitting out the Albany Frigg^{tt} and Discovery Sloop on A Discovery to the Northward in Hudsons

¹ Committee Minutes, 20 March 1719. HBC A 1/117, f. 12r.

² The Atlantic entrance of Hudson Strait is blocked for much of the year by ice passing across it from the north. In the strait itself ice moving from the west chokes the channel until the entrance is clear, and then enters the Atlantic. The strait is navigable for sailing ships for about three or four months of the year, usually from the middle of July until sometime in October.

³ Committee Minutes, 24 April 1719. Ibid., f. 17r.

Bay, Pursuant to his Contract with the Comp^a under his hand and seale, dated The 1st of May 1719.¹

This contribution by Knight to the cost of the expedition was, to say the least, an unusual departure from the normal procedure of the Company, which by this date had largely recovered from the disruption of the war years and functioned in a conventional business-like manner, paying dividends to the shareholders (from 1718 onwards), and wages and gratuities to those it employed. But Knight, with his early connections with the Company at a time when it was run on more casual lines, his frequent insistence on his right of private trade, and his later position as a stockholder and Committee member, had never fitted easily into the customary relationship between employer and employee. In 1692 and 1713 there had been prolonged haggling before he consented to take up the position offered him by the Company, and on the latter occasion he demanded privileges which at another time, and for another person, the Committee probably would have rejected. The arrangements for the expedition of 1719, by which at the same time as Knight received a salary from the Company he paid part of the cost of the venture, and presumably would have shared the expected profits, were never again repeated.

The minute and account books also contain references to the preparations for the voyage which add to the scanty information recorded about the expedition. A cargo of trading goods (blankets, knives, mirrors, beads and muskets) was put on board Knight's two vessels, the *Albany* and the *Discovery*; and also large quantities of brick and lime, building materials which show that Knight had taken to heart the lesson of Munk's disastrous stay in Hudson Bay a century earlier when almost all his crew perished in one dreadful winter at Churchill.² Besides

¹ Grand Journal, 30 Sept. 1722. HBC A 15/7, p. 34.

² A short account of Munk's voyage had been printed in Awnsham and John Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, II (London, 1704), pp. 472-6; and in 1716 Knight had pointed out to the Committee that 'When the Dean [Dane] Capt Monk Wintred at Churchill River he lost about 100 Men by his not having time to build, winter setting in so Soon upon him.' HBC A 11/114, f. 17v.

the discovery vessels, two other Company ships left England that year, bound on their yearly voyage to the Bay posts. A comparison of the lists of supplies taken by the four ships shows that if the regular Company ships took six months' provisions (their normal period of absence was four to five months), then the discovery ships carried provisions for about nine months. This relatively small quantity meant that the expedition would have to be mainly self-sufficient once through the passage, and the large amount of salt and other preservatives taken indicates that Knight was confident of finding fresh meat west of Hudson Bay.

About the discovery crews little is known, even their number not being recorded, although a comparison of the wages paid to them before sailing with those paid to the crews of the other two ships (whose number is known), suggests that the *Albany*, a frigate of just over a hundred tons, carried seventeen men, and the tiny *Discovery* sloop ten. None of the three whose names are known had served with the Company before, and it is doubtful if many among the crews had previous experience of Hudson Bay conditions.¹ The commanders of Knight's ships, however, were both experienced men: Berley, regular captain of the *Albany*, which had brought Knight home the previous autumn, and Vaughan, who had served as a sloop-master in Hudson Bay since 1714 and bore Knight's recommendation to the Committee, 'You cannot have a Soberer or a Brisker Man.'² Ten 'Landmen Passengers' were also carried on the voyage.³ From the nature of Knight's quest it seems probable that these were miners, smiths and the like; and there is confirmation of this in a newspaper report of the expedition which referred to 'several Artificers' being taken.⁴

Berley and Vaughan were placed under Knight's orders in all

¹ The estimates of the number of crew and the amount of provisions taken are based on accounts kept in the Grand Journal (HBC A 15/6, pp. 183-98) and the Grand Ledger (HBC A 14/7, p. 110).

² Knight to Committee, 17 Sept. 1716. HBC A 11/114, f. 19r.

³ Committee Minutes, 4 June 1719. HBC A 1/117, f. 24r.

⁴ *Saturday's Post*, 6 June 1719.

matters except the actual navigation of the ships. Since the entire control of the expedition rested in Knight's hands no detailed instructions were given to his captains about where they should search for the passage, but as Knight was sailing with Berley in the *Albany* an outline of the intended explorations had to be supplied to Vaughan, in case the *Discovery* became separated from the larger vessel. If this happened, he was

to proceed to the Latitude 64 Degrees North Latitude and from thence Northward to Endeavour to find out the Streights of Anian, and as Often as Conveniently you can to send your Boats to the Shoar side in order to find how high the Tide Rises and wht. Point of the Compas the flood comes from.¹

Instructions to investigate the height and direction of the flood-tide were almost routine orders to expeditions searching for a passage through Hudson Bay. It was argued that if there was a strait, the flood-tide from the Pacific would pass through it into Hudson Bay, causing a much higher tide along its western shore than would be expected at a point nearly a thousand miles from the Atlantic. Any indication of an abnormally high tide was thus a pointer to the passage, and a flood-tide coming from the west definite proof of a passage at that place. One had only to meet and trace back to its source the flood-tide, and the western ocean would be reached.

The Strait of Anian, which Vaughan's orders informed him was the objective of the expedition, first appeared on maps in the second half of the sixteenth century when it was shown as a narrow strait separating Asia from America (approximately in the position of the modern Bering Strait), and connecting the Pacific with another great sea to the north. By the late seventeenth century the legendary strait had moved to a position much farther south, and it is possible that Knight had seen one of the few maps of the early eighteenth century which indicated a connection between the Strait of Anian and Hudson Bay. The first published map of this type was issued in 1705 by Pierre Mortier, and was probably a pirated version of a manuscript

¹ Sailing Orders to Captain Vaughan, 4 June 1719. HBC A 6/4, f. 38v.

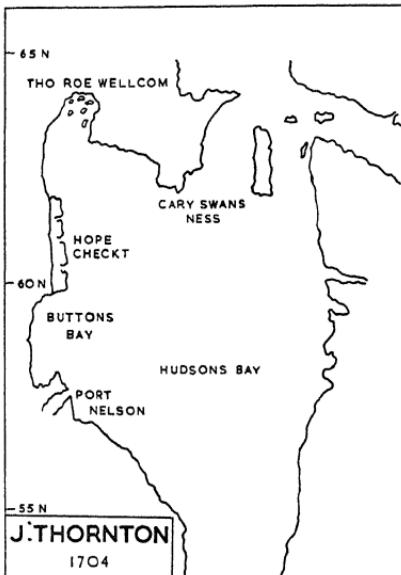
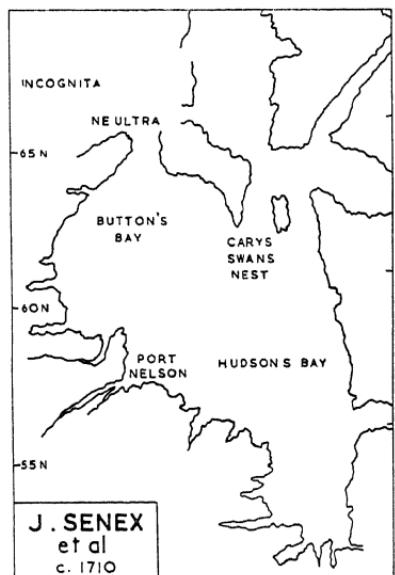
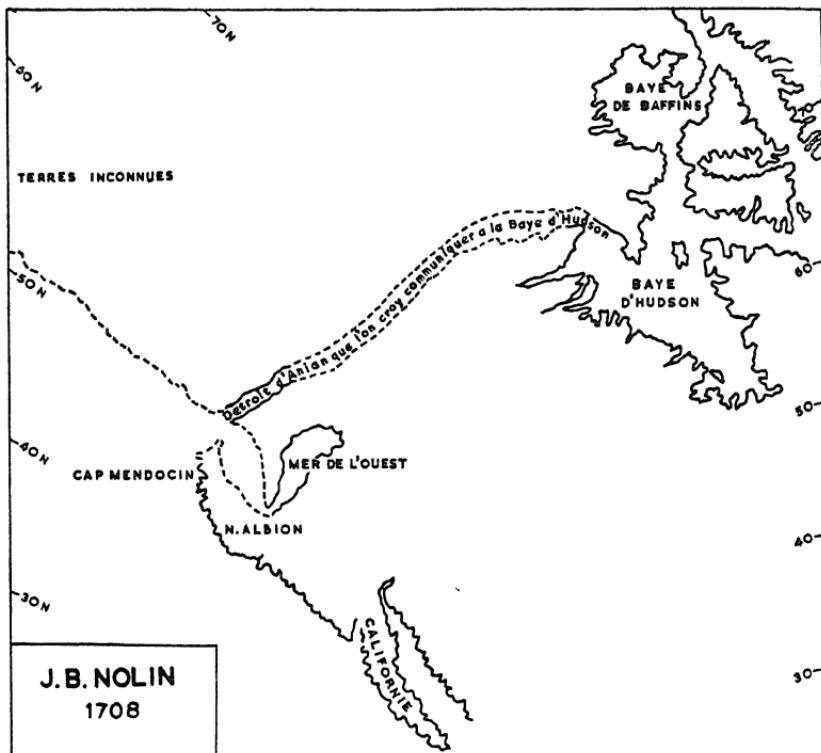
globe drawn a few years previously by the great French cartographer Guillaume de l'Isle.¹ It is doubtful whether a copy of this rare map ever reached England, but in 1708 another French geographer, J. B. Nolin, published a *Globe Terrestre* with many of the same features, including a Strait of Anian that stretched from the Pacific to the northwest of Hudson Bay, and bore along its length the explanatory legend, 'Détroit d'Anian que l'on croit communiquer à la Baye d'Hudson'. Such maps would be treated with more than usual attention at this time because of the long French occupation of York Fort during the war, and although it is a matter for speculation whether Knight ever saw this map, his propensity for naming the channel he was seeking the Strait of Anian, rather than the more normal term used by English explorers, the Northwest Passage, suggests that he had perhaps made some study of French or Dutch maps.

Hudson Bay, the starting-point of Knight's attempt to find a passage, was represented on maps of this period in two fashions, the most important difference being at Ne Ultra or Roe's Welcome. Some maps showed this as an enclosed bay, but others marked it as a large opening because Foxe, after his return from Hudson Bay in 1632, had insisted that the height of the tides there pointed to the probable existence of a passage nearby. An entry in the Committee's rough minute book confirms that Knight intended to look for a passage near this spot. The entry, made as the Committee assembled at Gravesend to pay and bid farewell to the crews of the ships bound for Hudson Bay, also sheds light on the avowed objects of the expedition led by Knight,

who is gone with the Albany and Discovery sloop in order to A Discovery of a NW Passage beyond Sir Tho' Buttons which is supposed to Lye to The northwards of 64 degrees, in order to Enlarge and Improve the Comps Trade with the Indians A Discovery of Sever¹¹ Mines according to the Information of Indians to our Gov^r in the Country, and also to Establish a whale fishery . . .²

¹ See H. R. Wagner, 'Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, XLI (1931), pp. 206-7.

² Committee Minutes, 4 June 1719. HBC A 1/117, f. 24v.



Early Eighteenth-Century Conceptions of Hudson Bay

'Sir Tho' Buttons', or Button's Bay, was a rather imprecise geographical term which referred to that part of the west coast of Hudson Bay between Churchill and the Welcome. Knight clearly intended to sail to the vicinity of the Welcome and turn west along a strait or river which would take his ships to the Pacific. If he died on the voyage, Berley and Vaughan were to follow the instructions he would leave in writing for finding the gold and copper mines. Their orders (to be opened only in the event of Knight's death) reveal no disinterested zeal for exploration, nor should any be expected. The search for the Strait of Anian was merely a means to an end: gold, trade and the 'Best Cargoe'.¹ If the quest for gold came to naught, then more sober alternatives remained: the enlarging of trade with the Indians and the establishment of a whale fishery.

One remaining clause of the instructions has a curious appearance. The expedition was neither to touch at any Hudson's Bay Company post, nor to sail south of latitude 64° N. in the Bay 'but in Case of the Utmost Extreamity only to preserve the Shipp, Sloop and Mens Lives';² and if this was necessary Knight and his crews were to consider themselves under the orders of Henry Kelsey, who had succeeded Knight as Governor at York. At first sight these instructions appear to confirm the assertions made later by critics of the Company, in particular Joseph Robson, about the Committee's hostility to Knight and his project.³ But before such a conclusion is justified an examination of conditions in Hudson Bay in 1719 has to be undertaken, and the fact borne in mind that the expedition, whatever extravagant claims were made on its behalf by Knight, was a minor (if

¹ Instructions to be opened on the death of Captain Knight, 1719. HBC A 6/4, f. 32v.

² Committee to Kelsey, 4 June 1719. *Ibid.*, f. 29v.

³ Joseph Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay, From 1733 to 1736, and 1744 to 1747* (London, 1752), p. 15, Appendix p. 37. Robson was a trouble-maker while in the Company service, and a vindictive critic once he left it. His book of 1752, written in collaboration with Arthur Dobbs, was a polemic work, and its statements must be treated with caution. See my article, 'Arthur Dobbs and Joseph Robson: New Light on the Relationship between Two Early Critics of the Hudson's Bay Company', *Canadian Historical Review*, XL (1959), pp. 132-6.

costly) venture when set against the permanent background of Company trade. Only in exceptional circumstances could the Committee permit it to disrupt that routine trade in the Bay which was the financial mainstay of the Company.

Although Kelsey had been made Governor in the Bay in succession to Knight, a letter from Kelsey to the factor at Churchill reveals that Knight and the 'Discoverers' had brought accusations against him in London which he attributed to 'the Effects of their Mallice to turn me out of my Employ for no other reasons than their being afraid of being out done'.¹ With relations between the old and the new Governor thus strained, it was natural that the Company should attempt to prevent any possibility of contact between them. Knight's arrival at Churchill or York might embarrass Kelsey in several ways. There was the danger of an open clash between the two antagonistic leaders, and the resources of the posts, with their carefully allocated food rations supplemented with the fresh meat brought in by the hunters, would be strained to the utmost by the arrival of an additional forty men. Moreover, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that Knight, never a man to concede defeat easily, might if disappointed in his main quest use his trade goods to get furs from the Indians in competition with Kelsey. Such competition, by forcing up the standard of trade, would harm trade in the Bay for years after Knight had departed. The Committee would have to consider all these possibilities, and its eventual decision that Knight must keep north of latitude 64° N., and that his expedition should be self-contained, is understandable under the circumstances, although it is possible that this lack of liaison between Knight and the Company posts was partly responsible for the disaster which overtook the expedition.

The attitude of the Company towards the expedition as a whole remains to be considered. Professor Morton, the one modern historian who has examined the expedition in some detail, has concluded, in contrast to Robson, that 'there is very definite

¹ Kelsey to Staunton, 1 Feb. 1720. HBC B 239/b/1, f. 26r.

evidence that the Committee, and indeed the whole Company, were as much carried away by the dreams of copper and gold as their overseas Governor'.¹ The evidence referred to was the trebling of stock by the Company in 1720 for extending its trade, Morton considering that the only expansion of trade sufficient to justify this move would be the discovery and exploitation of the gold and silver mines promised by Knight. The timing of the operation induces doubts about the validity of this theory. The Knight expedition sailed in June 1719, and although some of its instructions hopefully envisaged there being no necessity of wintering, it was plain that such a course was practically inevitable. In that case the expedition might be expected to return in the autumn of 1720. It is difficult to see, if the trebling of stock stemmed from hopes aroused by the Knight expedition, why the decision was delayed for fifteen months after the sailing of the expedition, and was then taken at a General Court at the end of August 1720, only a few weeks before the return of Knight's ships, or news concerning them, might be expected.² These financial manœuvres, made in the heady atmosphere of the Bubble period of 1720, were more probably connected with the boom in South Sea Company shares; and in December, after the crash of those stocks, and with, as the Committee expressed it, 'The Present Scarcety of Moneys, and the Deadness of Publick Credit', much of the scheme was abandoned.³

If it is granted that the Knight expedition had little connection with the stock manipulations of 1720, and that Robson's

¹ A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (London, 1939), p. 140. There are briefer accounts of the Knight expedition in Beckles Willson, *The Great Company (1667-1871) Being a History of the Honourable Company of Merchant-Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay*, I (London, 1900), pp. 267-70; Kenney, *Founding of Churchill*, Ch. V; Douglas MacKay (revised by Alice MacKay), *The Honourable Company. A History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Toronto, 1949), pp. 73-4; E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, I (London, The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), pp. 445-7.

² Apart from the annual meeting each November, a General Court was only summoned when matters of exceptional importance needed consideration.

³ Committee Minutes, 23 Dec. 1720. HBC A 1/119, f. 7r. An examination of the Company's financial transactions in this period is contained in Rich, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, I, Ch. XXXVI.

allegations (made at a time when the Company was being attacked for its failure to search for the Northwest Passage) are untrustworthy, then the only remaining evidence is a statement made in 1735 by one of the Company's senior captains, Christopher Middleton, who commented on the Knight episode that 'The Company were against him going; but as he was *opiniatre*, they durst not disoblige him, lest he should apply elsewhere'.¹ This brief statement must be considered seriously, for Middleton was in a good position to judge the veracity of rumours about the events which had led him to join the Company in 1721 in the hope that he too might reach the Northwest Passage.² That Knight could be *opiniatre* about his cherished project is evident from his journals and letters. Clearly, the ageing ex-Governor, intolerant of opposition, impatient with cautious Committee members, and dreaming of a land where the rain washed gold out of the cliffs in great lumps,³ would be a hard man to dissuade once his mind was set on the venture. And his threat to 'apply elsewhere' would be a most effective one, for reluctant though the Committee might be to fit out an expensive expedition at short notice and on doubtful evidence, it would be yet more averse to admit outsiders into the Bay, where under the guise of explorers they might steal the Company's trade.⁴

Reports in the only newspaper which made any mention of the expedition show that after arriving from Hudson Bay in the autumn of 1718 and reporting to the Committee, Knight had lain at Limehouse so ill 'by the excessive Cold he got in his Limbs in that Country' that he was unable to attend the Company for at least a month.⁵ It is reasonable to suppose that the Com-

¹ Arthur Dobbs, *Remarks upon Capt. Middleton's Defence* (London, 1744), p. 9.

² Christopher Middleton, *A Vindication of the Conduct of Captain Christopher Middleton, In A Late Voyage on Board His Majesty's Ship the Furnace, for Discovering a North-west Passage to the Western American Ocean* (London, 1743), pp. 40-1.

³ York Journal, 30 Jan. 1717. HBC B 239/a/3, f. 21r.

⁴ Since the Company's formation four interloping expeditions had sailed for Hudson Bay, all in the 1680s. Only one of these actually reached the Bay, but on several other occasions the Committee had been perturbed by rumours of such expeditions.

⁵ *Saturday's Post*, 22 Nov., 20 Dec. 1718.

mittee objected to a sick man of Knight's age commanding an expedition to the north; and here perhaps lay the cause of that dispute between the Committee and Knight, rumours of which later reached Middleton, and later still were put forward by critics of the Company as evidence that it was opposed to the whole idea of the venture. That members of the Committee might have had misgivings about Knight's scheme is understandable, and he doubtless used all possible arguments to persuade them to agree to it; but this is a far cry from the contention of later writers that so strongly was the Committee opposed to the project that on news of the fate of the expedition reaching England, 'some of the Company said upon this occasion that they did not value the loss of the ship and sloop as long as they were rid of those troublesome men'.¹ That such allegations could be made and believed is an indication of the deliberate but ill-advised policy of close secrecy the Company pursued at this time, and for many years to come.

The preparations for the expedition were completed by the end of May, and on 4 June all four Company ships were at Gravesend where the Committee took leave of the crews with the traditional wish for 'A prosperous voyage and safe'.² Early next morning the ships set sail, the *Hudson's Bay* and *Mary* for the Bay posts, and the *Albany* and *Discovery* for the Strait of Anian, carrying, it was rumoured, large iron-bound chests in which to bring back gold.³ On the ship bound for York were letters for Kelsey, informing him of the Knight expedition, and of the restrictions imposed on it by the Committee. Kelsey, ignorant of this venture, had himself sailed northward from York in June 'on discovery'. This was the first of several expeditions to the north during Kelsey's brief governorship in the Bay, and the Hudson's Bay Company later asserted that their objective was the discovery of the Northwest Passage. This

¹ Robson, *Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay*, p. 15.

² Committee Minutes, 4 June 1719. HBC A 1/117, f. 24r.

³ Robson, *Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay*, p. 37.

claim was made at a time, nearly thirty years later, when the Company was attacked by an association of merchants in a far from scrupulous manner, and in defence of its monopoly attempted to make its scanty record of exploration appear more imposing than it actually was. A pamphlet published by the Company at that time accordingly emphasized its 'repeated attempts' to find a passage, and listed them in detail in a paper it presented to the Parliamentary Committee which was then investigating its affairs.¹ The Northwest Passage was in fact the least concern of the four expeditions which sailed north from York or Churchill between 1719 and 1722 while Kelsey was Governor; but they must be briefly examined, both for the light they throw on the loss of Knight's ships, and in order to demonstrate the actual extent of the search for a passage in this period, divorced from the exaggerated claims and counter-claims put forward a generation later by the Hudson's Bay Company and its opponents.

Kelsey's letters to the other factors make it clear that he was seriously concerned about the inability of the new post at Churchill to pay its way.² He was therefore interested in the copper mine reported north of Churchill, the opening of trade with the Eskimos who lived along the northwest coast of the Bay, and the development of a black whale fishery; and these were the motives behind his first voyage to the north in 1719. At no time did Kelsey mention the Northwest Passage, and his scepticism about Knight's expedition makes it doubtful whether he believed one to be practicable. He arrived back at York with his two hoys on 10 August, having seen 'many Esquemos and gott some Whalebone Oyle and some Sea Horse teeth'.³ Soon after his return the *Hudson's Bay* from England was wrecked off the

¹ *The Case of the Hudson's-Bay Company* (London, 1749), p. 2; *Papers presented to the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State and Conditions of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, and of the Trade carried on there* (London, 1749), pp. 3-4. This collection will be referred to hereafter as *Parliamentary Papers*, 1749.

² Kelsey to Macklish, 20 June 1719; to Staunton, 27 Jan., 28 March 1719. HBC B 239/b/1, ff. 2, 8, 12.

³ Kelsey to Macklish, 18 Jan. 1720. HBC B 239/b/1, f. 25v.

fort, but its crew and cargo were saved, and Kelsey learnt for the first time about the Knight expedition. His pessimistic views on that venture, and his hostility to Knight, were expressed in a letter to Staunton, the factor at Churchill, who was urged to prosecute the northern trade with vigour.¹

For his part, Kelsey sent the two hoys north again in the summer of 1720 under the command of John Hancock. Hancock had orders to sail to latitude 61° N., trading with the Eskimos for whalebone, oil and copper. If he saw Knight's expedition, and it had finished its explorations, he was to order it to Churchill. But the news Kelsey received of the explorers gave him little pleasure: 'Mr. Handcock tells me the Goldfinders winter'd where wee had been last Summer and had traded with those Indians and Spoiled our Trade'.² This was presumably at Lake's Cove in latitude 62° N., although Hancock had not reached that spot himself in 1720, and must have picked up reports of the expedition's presence in the region from Eskimos farther south along the coast. The next year, 1721, Kelsey commanded the northern expedition in person; not to search for the Northwest Passage, as the Hudson's Bay Company pleaded in 1749, but as the Council at York noted, 'in hopes to advance the Eskemoe trade'.³ So the same procedure was to be followed as on the preceding voyages: the hoys were to sail to Lake's Cove, which was by this time the established rendezvous with the Eskimos, and stay there trading for a few days. The tiny vessels were then to sail farther north, for Staunton had instructions from Kelsey to persuade the Copper Indians northwest of Churchill to travel to that stretch of the coast nearest their mines, if possible by way of a river flowing into the Bay, and there await the arrival of the two hoys which would announce their presence by firing a cannon three times a day.⁴

Kelsey did not sail as far north in 1721 as he had gone two years earlier, for, as he explained in an entry casually phrased,

¹ Kelsey to Staunton, 1 Feb. 1720. *Ibid.*, f. 26r.

² York Journal, 10 Aug. 1720. HBC B 239/a/5, f. 80v.

³ York Council, 24 June 1721. HBC B 239/b/2, f. 3r.

⁴ Kelsey to Staunton, 27 Jan. 1719. HBC B 239/b/1, f. 12r.

but containing the first indication that disaster had overtaken the Knight expedition, 'y^e winds did not favour my Intentions of going further to y^e N^oward to look for y^e place where y^e albany sloop was lost we seeing things belonging to those vessels.'¹ The fact that Kelsey was back at Churchill by the middle of August casts some doubt on the seriousness of his professed determination to sail north; and the next year, when he had at his disposal a new sloop from England, the *Whalebone*, for the northern voyage, he gave no orders to its master John Scroggs to search for survivors of the Knight expedition. Instead he relayed to Scroggs the original instructions from the Committee which had been drawn up in London at a time when there was no hint that all was not well with Knight's ships.² These bade Scroggs sail north along the west coast of the Bay to latitude 66½° N. without stopping, and then to make what discoveries he could on the way back; and although Kelsey added some directions of his own to the sloop-master they referred only to the search for the copper mines.³ Nevertheless, the Scroggs expedition was of considerable importance. It confirmed that Knight's ships had been lost, and its explorations were the only ones since those of Foxe and James to help Arthur Dobbs in his quest some years later for information about the coastline where the entrance of the Northwest Passage was confidently expected to lie.⁴

The *Whalebone* sailed from Churchill on 22 June 1722 with a

¹ A. G. Doughty and C. Martin (eds.), *The Kelsey Papers* (Ottawa, The Public Archives and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1929), p. 116.

² The expedition was mentioned only in passing in the annual letter to Kelsey, and the note struck was one of curiosity rather than concern: 'We cannot but Admire what is become of Capt Knight not haveing heard any Thing from him to This Time, and hope he had better Luck in finding his Passage Then to winter with you.' Committee to Kelsey, 26 May 1721. HBC A 6/4, f. 49v.

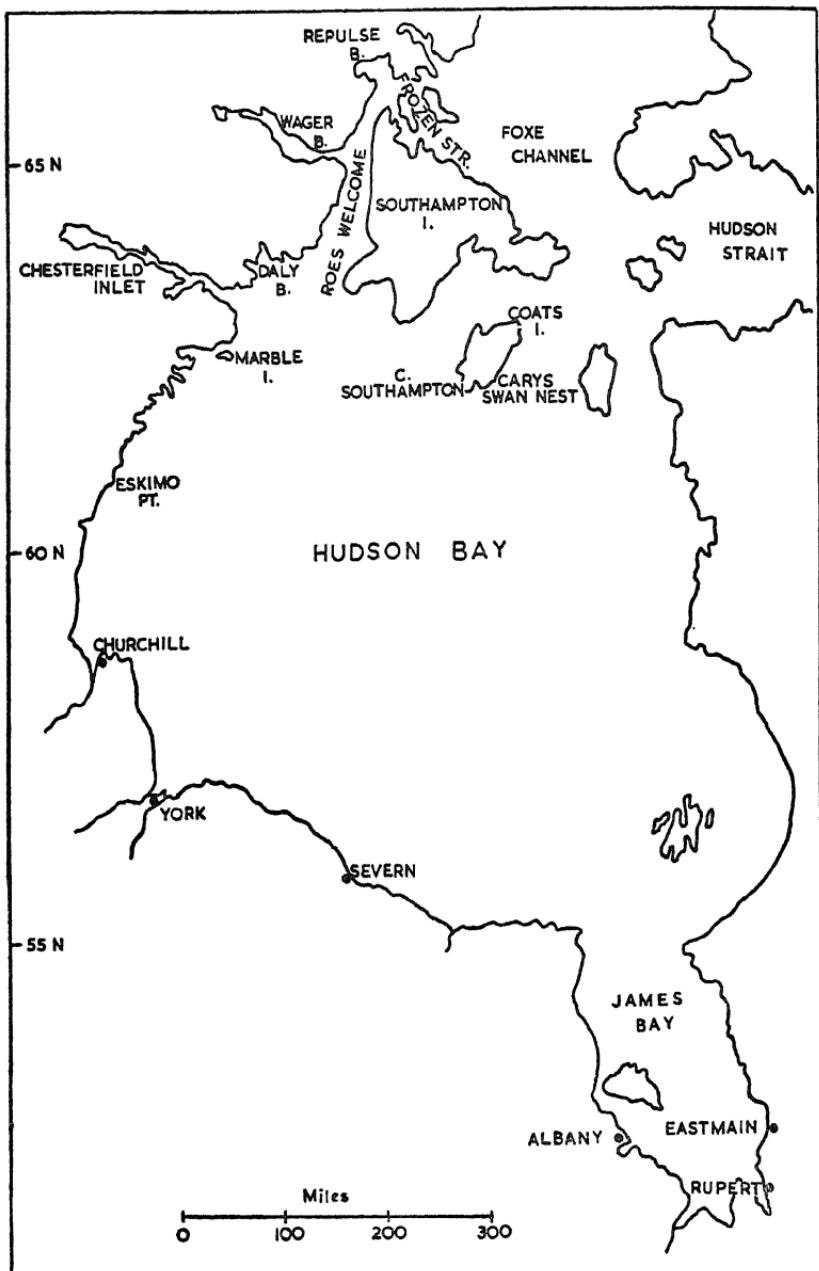
³ Kelsey to Scroggs, 31 Jan. 1722. HBC B 239/b/3, p. 11.

⁴ The journal kept by Scroggs is not now in the Company archives, but Middleton sent extracts from it to Dobbs in the winter of 1737-8 which the latter published in his *Remarks*, pp. 113-17. A fuller summary of the journal was printed in *An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage*, written by T. S. Drage under the pseudonym of the 'Clerk of the California', and published in London in 1748-9.

crew of ten, two Northern Indians, and Richard Norton. Scroggs, though notoriously a poor navigator, refused to take with him Christopher Middleton, second mate on one of the Company ships, who was a skilled navigator and had wintered at Churchill with the specific intention of sailing on the *Whalebone*. A parchment map drawn in charcoal by the Indians, together with information sent Scroggs by Kelsey about the coast as far north as latitude 62°40' N., were apparently the expedition's only guides. The sloop sailed north, trading with Eskimos for whalebone on the way, until in latitude 62°48' N. part of a ship's foremast was picked out of the water. It was highly improbable that this was other than a relic of Knight's expedition, but Scroggs made no attempt to search the region and followed his instructions in keeping north. By 9 July a southerly wind had taken the *Whalebone* to a latitude which Scroggs gave as 64°33' N., although there is reason to believe that all his estimated latitudes were too far north. The rest of Scroggs' account, when compared with a modern map, makes little sense if read literally. For example, when in latitude 64°33' N. he maintained that he was only a few miles from the northern end of the Welcome, whereas he was one hundred and fifty miles distant. Again, Scroggs referred to the north and south shores of the Welcome in this latitude, although a glance at the map will show that it is difficult to speak of anything but a west and east shore in this region. Drage, who sailed on a voyage of exploration along the west coast of Hudson Bay twenty-five years later, advanced the only explanation which squares with the known geography of the area. Scroggs was not in the main channel of the Welcome at all, but in a bay which he named Whalebone Bay (probably the present Daly Bay).¹ Scroggs' observations now make sense: the northern shore of what he thought was the Welcome was that part of the coast between Daly Bay and the entrance of Chesterfield Inlet, and his statement that the Welcome stretched to the west is explained by the presence of the inlet.

Norton twice went ashore with the two Indians, and reported

¹ Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, p. 175.



Hudson Bay and the Company Posts

an open sea and clear passage to the west (in fact, Chesterfield Inlet); but Scroggs refused to go farther, and when the boat's crew reported that progress up the Welcome was prevented by a bar of stones, decided to return to Churchill, seeking news as he went of the *Albany* and *Discovery*. The explanation given by Drage for this fictitious bar across the Welcome, and for Scroggs' refusal to explore the westward passage described by Norton, was that the crew were anxious to return to Churchill in time to board the homeward bound ship, and that Scroggs himself was 'a timerous Person and in no Way fond of the Expedition'.¹ These assertions are supported by the Company records, which show that the crew of the *Whalebone* were under contract for one year only, and that Kelsey had showed some concern about the sloop-master's lack of enthusiasm for the voyage.² The reluctant Scroggs was clearly not of the stuff out of which great explorers are made, and one of the obstacles to the discovery and development of the Bay region was that the Company servants in charge of trading vessels or trading posts were, for the most part, temperamentally unfitted for the hazardous tasks of exploration which they were sometimes expected to undertake as a sideline to the routine business of trading and accounting. Men like Knight and Kelsey were the exception rather than the rule.

On the sloop's return voyage to Churchill a boat was sent ashore at Marble Island (still known by Foxe's name of Brook Cobham at this time), near which the piece of a ship's foremast had been found floating on the outward voyage, and members of the crew retrieved from the Eskimos part of a cabin lining, a medicine chest, ice-poles, and part of a mast. But they did not find the cove where Knight's ships lay under five fathoms of water, and it was commonly believed that the vessels had been lost among the shoals and reefs off the mainland to the west of the island after wintering somewhere near Lake's Cove. Scroggs

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

² York Council, 11 Sept. 1721. HBC B 239/b/2, f. 9r. Kelsey to Scroggs, 31 Jan. 1722; to Staunton, 8 Feb. 1722. HBC 239/b/3, pp. 9, 13.

was convinced that there were no survivors, and on his return to Churchill reported to Staunton that 'he had been where the Albany and Discovery Sloop where both Ship-wrecked and he doth Affirm that Every Man was Killed by the Eskemoes, w^{ch} I am heartily Sorry for their hard fortune'.¹

At intervals further relics of Knight's ships were picked up, but not until 1767 was definite evidence of the fate of the expedition found. In that year the Company whaling sloop *Success* anchored in a harbour on the southwest side of Marble Island which was used by the Company whalers as a temporary base. When the sloop's whaling boats were sent out their crews were ordered to look into every bay on the island to pick up drift-wood, and while engaged on this task came across a small harbour on the southeast side of the island which could only be entered when high tide covered the rocky bar at its mouth. To their surprise the crews saw that vessels had obviously wintered there, and they took back to the sloop a smith's anvil, cannon and shot. On making a further search the master of the sloop, Joseph Stevens, discovered the ruins of a brick building and a large heap of coal. On the smooth rocks nearby great quantities of wood-chips from ships' timbers were strewn around, indicating that carpenters had been at work, and that a ship had been wrecked. A few days later Stevens visited the harbour again, this time accompanied by Magnus Johnston, master of the *Churchill* sloop. The ground was dug over to try to find papers that might have been left by the crews, but all that the spades turned up was a human skull; the first sign of tragedy. More information was given by the Eskimo interpreters on the sloops who, when shown the site, told Johnston 'that they heard there Country people Say that there Was some of the English men Surviv'd the first winter—but wither they was Starv'd with Could or hunger or Destroy'd by the Natives is a thing I cannot find out As yet'.²

The desolate spot exerted a morbid fascination on the crews,

¹ Churchill Journal, 25 July 1722. HBC B 42/a/2, f. 51r.

² Johnston Journal, 4 Aug. 1767. HBC 42/a/68, f. 41r.

and Samuel Hearne, mate of the *Churchill*, took men to examine it. The party returned with the news 'That they had found A Great Number Graves, one of which Mr. Hearne cawsed the people to digg up in order to Sea if they find Any thing Remarkable—but could not only the Bons of a Stout man who without Doubt is one of the Unhappay Sufferars'.¹ No hint was given in the journals that either master realized that the graveyard of the Knight expedition had at last been found, but Hearne, writing at a later date, added to the information given in the logs. He saw the hulks of the two discovery ships lying in five fathoms of water, and when various relics from the site were sent to England, they were identified as being from Knight's ships. In 1769 Hearne visited the harbour again, and there an old Eskimo told him that the crews had died of disease and hunger, a few surviving with Eskimo assistance until the summer of 1721.² As Morton has pointed out in his account of the expedition, this is probably not the whole story;³ and his opinion that the crews, once depleted and weakened by disease, were attacked by Eskimos, is strengthened by Scroggs' report of 1722, and by evidence of Eskimo hostility towards the Company sloops when they started regular trading voyages north from Churchill after 1750.⁴

It is doubtful whether any of Knight's men survived until 1721, for the provisions taken on the voyage would not prevent scurvy unless they were supplemented by fresh food. Experience at the Company posts in the Bay had shown that only fresh meat and rigorous exercise could ward off the dread disease. On the barren, treeless island, fifteen miles from the mainland

¹ Johnston Journal, 6 Aug. 1767. *Ibid.*, f. 41v. The journal of the master of the *Success* is in HBC 42/a/69.

² Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean. Undertaken by order of the Hudson's Bay Company, for the discovery of Copper Mines, a NorthWest Passage, &c. In the Years 1769, 1770, 1771, and 1772* (London, 1795), introduction, pp. xxix–xxxii.

³ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp. 144–5.

⁴ The journal of James Walker (HBC 42/a/41) shows that in 1753 three hundred Eskimos tried to seize his sloop off the coast south of Marble Island, and that he and his crew only narrowly escaped.

there would be little chance of getting meat either in the form of cariboux or partridges. On this desolate rock where, a later explorer wrote, 'the winds of almost perpetual winter blow in pitiless and withering blasts',¹ exposure would mean frost-bite and death; lack of exercise, scurvy and death. The same fate had overtaken Munk's Danish expedition at Churchill in 1619, when only three out of a crew of sixty-four had survived the winter, and the dilemma was one that confronted all Arctic explorers. The great pile of coal outside the ruin is a further indication that there were no survivors from Knight's expedition to face a second winter.

Not the least baffling of the several mysteries that surround the expedition is the reason why Knight went to Marble Island. After his illness of the previous winter the aged explorer must have realized that he could hardly survive another winter in Arctic conditions, and his stay at Churchill in 1717 among the remains of Munk's expedition had furnished a grim reminder of the perils of a northern winter to an unprepared crew. There is no record in the Company minutes or ledgers of special clothing being provided for the crews, and Vaughan's instructions specifically warned him to 'take Especiall Care to Return Back before you are in Danger of being frozen up'.² The large quantities of salt and other preservatives taken, compared with the relatively small amount of beef and pork, show that Knight hoped to rely on freshly-caught meat, which could only be found considerably to the south of his final position. Whether, after spending fruitless weeks in the autumn of 1719 searching the northwest coast of the Bay for a passage, Knight allowed obstinacy and pride to overrule his judgment, and rather than admit 'Utmost Extreamity' and ask shelter from Kelsey, decided to brave the severity of a winter on Marble Island; or whether his vessels were storm-bound in the tiny harbour until ice made it impossible to sail south, will never be known. As has been indicated, the reliability of Hearne's Eskimo informant is open to

¹ C. R. Tuttle, *Our North Land* (Toronto, 1885), p. 115.

² HBC A 6/4, f. 38v.

question, but if his description was true of the pitiful plight of the last of Knight's men left alive on the island, who 'frequently went to the top of an adjacent rock, and earnestly looked to the South and East, as if in expectation of some vessels coming to their relief',¹ then their fate was the more tragic in the light of our present knowledge that trading vessels from York were on the coast in the summer of 1720 only two days' sailing time from the island, their crews entirely ignorant of the catastrophe that had overtaken the discovery expedition.

After Scroggs returned to Churchill with his news of the disaster, the reluctance of Company servants in the Bay to venture away from the posts hardened into a dread of the unknown coast north of Lake's Cove, where two well-found ships had vanished almost without trace. This attitude was matched in London by the disinclination of the Committee to fit out any more costly discovery expeditions. Not for over thirty years did another Company ship sail as far north as Scroggs had been, and with the death of Knight and the retirement in 1722 of Kelsey little more was heard of plans for the expansion of the Company's trade to the northward, or of ambitious schemes to discover mineral deposits. Macklish, who replaced Kelsey at York, had suffered when factor at Albany from Knight's obsession about minerals and was sceptical from the beginning about the policy of northern exploration, while Norton at Churchill was disillusioned in 1724 by the results of his interrogation of a Northern Indian who insisted that the copper country 'was Such a Distance off that he Could not Travill their in less than 3 Winters time'.² The next year, although Norton was exhorted to report any discovery of interest to the north, the *Whalebone*, the only vessel in the Bay available for ventures outside the normal inter-post trips, was ordered home. There was neither incentive nor means for further voyages northward, and the Northwest Passage was consigned once more to the realm of legend and

¹ Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, introduction, p. xxx.

² Churchill Journal, 22 June 1724. HBC B 42/a/4, f. 30r.

fantasy. But among those in the Company's employ one man at least never forgot what had been seen on the Scroggs expedition, the 'open sea' stretching away west of the *Welcome*; and twenty years later Christopher Middleton, by then a veteran of many voyages to the Bay, seized the chance denied him in 1722 and followed the track of Knight's ill-fated ships in search of a strait to the Pacific.

Arthur Dobbs: Theorist and Publicist

WITHIN a decade of the disappearance of the Knight expedition, the question of the Northwest Passage was under consideration again, but not by a member of the Hudson's Bay Company. The new enthusiast was Arthur Dobbs, a wealthy Ulster landowner and a member of the Irish House of Commons. By 1729 his early interest in Irish trade had widened to include the commerce of Britain and the colonies; and he wrote a long memorandum in which he called for a more vigorous colonial policy, and outlined plans for containing, and then seizing, French possessions in North America.¹ While engaged in this work Dobbs had read the journals of the early explorers of the continent, and gradually his curiosity about their discoveries turned into a conviction that the entrance of the Northwest Passage might yet be discovered on the west coast of Hudson Bay. For twenty years Dobbs waged a dedicated, and at times single-handed, campaign in support of this belief; and his promotion of two expeditions to Hudson Bay at a time when there was little general interest in exploration was a remarkable achievement.

The first step in this campaign was the drafting in 1731 of a seventy-page memorial which remains one of the most coherent and persuasive statements of the case for a Northwest Passage.²

¹ See Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire 1689-1765 Surveyor-General of Ireland Prospector and Governor of North Carolina* (London, 1958), pp. 31-5.

² The memorial was never published, but there are several manuscript copies extant: one among the Dobbs Papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (D.O.D. 162/25); one addressed to Frederick, Prince of Wales, in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow; and two in the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company. A postscript to another copy, in the possession of the Marquess of Hertford until 1959, states that the memorial was first written in 1731 and revised in 1733. See *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, 4th Report, Pt. 1 (London, 1874), p. 251. All references in this chapter are to a copy of the memorial in Dobbs' handwriting in the Hudson's Bay Company archives (HBC E 18/1, ff. 71-105).

The first thirty pages of the document contained an examination of the discoveries and observations of former Arctic explorers in which Dobbs eliminated those regions where he considered there was no possibility of a passage being found. The route by way of Davis Strait and Baffin Bay (where in the nineteenth century the eastern entrance of the passage was finally discovered) was ruled out because the west coast of Baffin Bay was blocked by ice, and also because Baffin had not observed there any sign of a tide from the west. The voyages of Bylot, Hudson, Button, James and Foxe had shown that there could be no passage in Hudson Bay either by way of Foxe Channel or along the west coast between latitudes 51° N. and 64° N. The only remaining region was Ne Ultra or Roe's Welcome, and there, wrote Dobbs, 'the presumptions are strong for a Passage, and that there is a Communication with the Western American Ocean in that place'. This surmise followed closely the opinion of James Knight, although Dobbs, who at this time knew nothing about the Knight expedition and began his memorial with the sentence, 'You may be Surpris'd that I should at this time endeavour to revive an attempt to discover the Northwest Passage . . . which has in a manner been exploded since the year 1631, A Century ago', was unaware of this similarity as he put forward his reasons in favour of a passage near Ne Ultra.

The most important of these arguments was based on the height and direction of the tides in Hudson Bay. Dobbs' observations on tides were technical to a degree, but their significance was explained in more homely language by one of his supporters who wrote, some years later:

We may consider Hudson's-Bay, as a kind of Labyrinth, into which we enter on one side through Hudson's-Straits, and what we aim at, is to get out on the other side . . . the Tide is a Kind of Clue, which seems to lead us by the Hand through all the Windings and Turnings of this Labyrinth, and if studiously and steadily followed must certainly lead us out.¹

¹ Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's-Bay by the Dobbs Galley and California. In the Years 1746 and 1747, For Discovering a North West Passage* (London, 1748), pp. 330-1.

To meet and trace the flood-tide from the west was the way to find the passage, reasoned Dobbs, and he therefore stressed that when Foxe was near the west coast of the Bay in latitude 64°10' N. he had observed a flood-tide of eighteen feet, although the journals of the early explorers showed that from Hudson Strait westward to Carys Swan Nest (the name given to the southeast tip of Coats Island) the tide diminished, as would be expected as one got farther from the ocean, to a mere six feet. Furthermore, since the flood-tide noted by Foxe came from the northeast it could not be a continuation of that from Hudson Strait past Carys Swan Nest, even if the great difference in height were ignored. Such tidal phenomena could only be explained 'if we suppose a Western Ocean flowing in a Streight nigh Ne Ultra into the Bay. Then there is the same reason for a high Tide's flowing There, as at Resolution Isle in Hudsons Streight.'¹

Dobbs went on to expound a number of other points which seemed to support his argument. The whales observed near the west coast of the Bay were 'a great Confirmation of a Great Sea being to the Westward of Ne Ultra' since no whales had ever been sighted passing through Hudson Strait into the Bay. But here Dobbs had to rely on the accounts of only a few voyages, some of which had been published in abridged form; and although he was correct in noting the number of whales in the northwest part of Hudson Bay, they came, not from the Pacific as he imagined, but through Hudson Strait in the spring, and from the ice-bound seas to the north.² Again, Dobbs found evidence in the early journals which seemed to show that at the same time of the year as James Bay in the south was still frozen, the sea from Carys Swan Nest to York Fort was free from ice, although if Ne Ultra were a closed bay the sea near it might reasonably be expected to remain frozen long after the ice had cleared in James Bay, six hundred miles to the south.

¹ Resolution Island is at the Atlantic entrance of Hudson Strait.

² See evidence of American whaling captains printed in *Report of the Expedition to Hudson Bay and Cumberland Gulf . . . in the Year 1897* (Dept. of Marine and Fisheries, Ottawa, 1898), pp. 54-60.

This freedom from ice was, Dobbs considered, a strong argument in favour of a passage and open sea to the west and northwest of Ne Ultra. In fact his reasoning on this matter betrayed a fundamental weakness; failure to appreciate that general principles and rules are often modified by local conditions. In this instance Dobbs ignored the complicating factor that ice conditions varied from year to year, and that conclusions based on a few scattered observations made in various parts of the Bay in different years had little validity. His information came to him at second hand, and impressive though his arguments might appear on paper he had no personal knowledge of conditions in Hudson Bay. Nor did he have a seaman's experience which would have taught him the difficulty of accurately gauging tides and currents from the deck of a ship. This difficulty partly explains some of the high tides reported by explorers along the west coast of the Bay which misled Dobbs; and another factor which must be taken into account is that the weak tide reaching the west coast past Carys Swan Nest is reinforced by the tide running through two channels unknown to Dobbs, Frozen Strait (discovered in 1742) and Fisher Strait (not discovered until the nineteenth century). It is this threefold source of the tide along the west coast which explains its unusual height there compared with other parts of the Bay.

Dobbs' reliance on tidal observations to support belief in the existence of a passage followed well-established precedents. The account in Purchas of Hudson's last voyage included the note that 'the Ship comming aground at Digges Iland, in 62. degrees 44. minutes, a great flood came from the West and set them on floate: an argument of an open passage from the South Sea'.¹ This opinion was reflected in Prince Henry's instructions in 1612 to Button, who was ordered to make for the west coast of Hudson Bay in latitude 58° N. 'where, riding at some headland, observe well the flood; if it come in southwest, then you maie be

¹ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow, 1906 edn.), XIII, p. 412.

sure the passage is that waie';¹ and despite the failure of successive expeditions to discover a passage in Hudson Bay, Purchas found in Button's tidal observations hope of a passage because of the high tide at Port Nelson (near York Fort) compared with that at the bottom of the Bay.² But it was from Foxe that Dobbs derived most of his opinions, and a comparison of his memorial with Foxe's *Voyage* of 1635 shows that Dobbs leant heavily on the explorer: his own role was that of a publicist rather than an original thinker. At one time Foxe had intended wintering in Hudson Bay and exploring *Ne Ultra* the next summer, because he was convinced that there, if anywhere, lay the passage. His reasons were those which Dobbs later advanced: the tide from the west, and the number of whales and seals sighted. Foxe believed, as did Dobbs, that the passage would be a short one, and unobstructed by ice, because the tide was so high that the western ocean could not be far distant. This proximity of the ocean was, in Foxe's opinion, further confirmed by the comparative mildness of the climate at *Ne Ultra* and the lack of ice and snow there. All these points were stressed by Dobbs in his memorial.

Belief in the existence of a Northwest Passage had, almost from the beginning, been buttressed by reports of various navigators who claimed they had sailed through the passage, and in the 1740s Dobbs turned to these apocryphal voyages for support of his theories. But in the memorial he mentioned only the voyage of Juan de Fuca, related by Michael Lok and printed by Purchas.³ Lok maintained that in 1596 he had met in Venice an old Greek pilot, Juan de Fuca, who had sailed with a Spanish expedition in 1592 to seek the Pacific entrance of the Strait of Anian. After passing the coast of California Fuca found the land to trend north and northeast, and between latitudes 47° N. and 48° N. he discovered a great inlet, thirty or forty leagues wide,

¹ Miller Christy (ed.), *The Voyages of Captain Luke Foxe of Hull, and Captain Thomas James of Bristol, in Search of a North-West Passage in 1631-32* (London, The Hakluyt Society, 1894), Introduction, p. xxviii.

² Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, XIV, p. 412.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 415-21. See also Appendix I, *infra*.

in the entrance of which rose a pillar-like rock. He passed through this inlet into a wide sea, with rich countries on its shores, and after sailing in it twenty days returned to Mexico. Dobbs devoted only a page to the story, and although he commented 'if we may . . . give Credit to the Account . . . it will absolutely confirm there being a passage', did not lay any great emphasis on it. Observations made by accredited explorers furnished the main part of his argument, and at this stage he felt himself in little need of the dubious aid of rumour and legend.

Dobbs stated in the memorial that he had originally intended to approach the South Sea Company, and persuade them to send whalers from Davis Strait to *Ne Ultra* to search for a passage, whaling on the way; but that he found that the Company had abandoned its fishery. Instead he proposed that the regular Hudson's Bay Company ships should 'spare time to go to *Ne Ultra* before they went into the Bay, and fix whether there be a passage there or not, and yet have time to make their passage home in the Same Season'. If this were impossible, then it would cost little for the Admiralty to send two sloops to look for the passage. Two points emerge from these nonchalant suggestions. Firstly, Dobbs greatly underestimated the difficulty of the search. Time was to show that the question could not be determined by part-time, hurried expeditions, but only by several seasons of methodical exploration along the dangerous, ice-bound west coast of Hudson Bay. The second point is perhaps less obvious. In later years Dobbs became a determined critic of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Company's alleged failure to search for a passage was one of the weapons in his arsenal which he used as the occasion demanded; but there was no indication of such a policy in this period. The abandonment of a whole-hearted search for the passage in favour of a plan for wresting the trade of the Bay from the Company was a gradual process, and the memorial, which was written before Dobbs' first contact with members of the Company, contained no evidence of hostility towards it, nor any anticipation of his later

assertion that the Company had a definite obligation to search for the passage.

Finally, Dobbs set out the incentives which he hoped might persuade the Hudson's Bay Company or the Admiralty to send an expedition of discovery to the Bay. Here he was at his most persuasive, blending the practical mercantilist doctrines of his day with old beliefs in rich, unknown countries lying in the great expanse of ocean between America and Asia. In the middle of the sixteenth century Jesuits in Japan had learnt of a land to the north called Yedso, and some years later a rumour spread that a Spanish vessel had been driven by storms to an island four hundred miles east of Japan where gold and silver were so common that domestic utensils were made of them. At the beginning of the seventeenth century a Portuguese navigator, Juan de Gama, was alleged to have discovered land in the north Pacific; and in 1649 the commander of a Dutch East India ship claimed to have sighted Yedso, and also part of the American continent which he named Company Land. The confusion caused by these vague and unauthenticated reports was apparent on maps of the north Pacific, on which bewildered cartographers strove to reconcile the various accounts, and sometimes showed Yedso, Gama Land, and Company Land as islands, sometimes as part of America or Asia. But to Dobbs these fabulous countries were as real as was the wide strait west of Hudson Bay which he imagined led to them; and to the readers of his memorial—the Prince of Wales, Sir Robert Walpole, Sir Charles Wager, and all those persons of rank and influence who might help in the venture—he declaimed:

What great advantage might be made by having a passage to California in three or four Months and so down the Western Coast of America into the South Sea where a New and beneficial Commerce might be carry'd on along the Spanish Coast and among Many Islands and Countrys in the Great Southern Ocean not yet fully discover'd such as the Islands of Solomon &c. How Great woud be the benefit in time of War to be able in a short time to send Ships of War or privateers into the South Sea to intercept the Spanish Commerce. How great wou'd be the benefit to send Ships

an Easy and short way to Japan and Even to China; and to be able to send a Squadron of Ships, Even to force Japan into a Beneficial Treaty of Commerce with Britain. How great wou'd be the Advantage of opening a New Trade for our Woollen Manufactures in the Temperate and Cold Regions near California in America and along the country of Yedso and other Countrys in our passage yet unknown. By making a few Settlements there we should ingross All their Commerce and open a New Market for our Manufactures vastly Advantagious to us, Inlarge our Trade for furrs, increase our Navigation and Employ all our Poor, and by civilizing those Countrys make Numberless Nations happy, and this advantage we already have, that both by Treaty and prior possession we already have All the Country and Trade of Hudsons Bay and Streight, and by our Discovery and by making early Contracts with the Nations for Settlements upon their Coasts, His Majesty and the people of Britain wou'd have a Legal and just pretension to Settle Colonies in proper places without the other Powers of Europe having any pretence to make any.

The appeal to national and anti-Spanish sentiments, the expectation of exclusive privileges, the hope of finding new markets for English woollens, and the pious reference to the civilizing mission of European traders and colonists all have a familiar ring; and it does not require close scrutiny to reveal that Dobbs' arguments mostly dated from the days of the early ventures of overseas discovery and settlement. His knowledge of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works of travel and trade enabled him to select those points which still seemed relevant; but his achievement lay in the skilful manner in which he took the scattered opinions in favour of the existence of a Northwest Passage from the obscurity into which they had fallen with the passage of years, and welded them into a coherent theory which by his pertinacity and flair for publicity he brought to the notice of the influential politicians and merchants of his day. To a few of these, far removed from the losses and disillusionments of past expeditions, the arguments which Dobbs revived came as fresh as if they were new. They could not fail to note the contrast between the immense gains to the nation which would result from the discovery of a passage, and the small effort

which Dobbs considered would either reveal or disprove its existence. The memorial was an appeal not only to current mercantilist ideals, but to the perennial gambling instinct. If the venture failed, a little money would have been lost: if it succeeded, the trade of the nation might well be transformed.

Dobbs first sought support for a discovery expedition on visits to England in 1731 and 1733, when he showed the memorial to Colonel Bladen, one of the Lords Commissioners of the Board of Trade and Plantations, and Sir Charles Wager, First Lord of the Admiralty. On his second visit Dobbs obtained an interview with Samuel Jones, Deputy Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, who in 1719 had served on the sub-committee which negotiated with Knight; but his attitude towards the project was not encouraging. He stressed the expense and fate of the Knight expedition, and although Dobbs pertinently pointed out that the fact that Knight's ships had been wrecked had little bearing on the question of the existence of a passage, he could get no promise of help.¹

It was Dobbs' first brush with the cautious, sceptical and somewhat unimaginative men who ruled the Company at this time, and evidently it gave him food for thought, since on his next visit to England in the spring of 1735 he obtained permission from Bladen to inspect the charter of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Plantation Office. The Company was at some pains to keep the terms of its grant from being generally known, and Dobbs was clearly surprised at the extent of the Company's privileges in North America.² In his memorial he had described in glowing terms the advantages which the discovery of a Northwest Passage would bring to British trade in general, but he

¹ Dobbs, *Remarks*, pp. 4-5.

² The charter of 1670 granted the Company 'the whole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, and Bays, Rivers, Lakes, Creeks, and Sounds, in whatsoever Latitude they shall be, that lie within the Entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudson's Streights, together with all the Lands, Countries, and Territories upon the Coasts and Confines of the Seas, Streights, Bays, Lakes, Rivers, Creeks, and Sounds aforesaid'. *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, Appendix I, pp. i-ii.

now realized that the benefits would probably be confined to the entrenched shareholders of the Hudson's Bay Company. With this point in mind, Dobbs sought an interview with Sir Bibye Lake, the Governor whose careful management contributed much to the stability of the Company in these years, showed him the memorial, and argued that as the Company alone, by virtue of its monopoly, stood to profit from the discovery of a passage in Hudson Bay, then it was reasonable that it should undertake the search.

Like Jones, the Governor was unenthusiastic, and emphasized the great expense of the lost expedition of 1719; but when Dobbs insisted that it would only be necessary to send one or two small sloops north from Churchill to *Ne Ultra* to try the tides, and to sail fifty or sixty leagues into any passage to the west, Lake conceded that the Committee would probably be willing to bear the small cost involved. He warned that the resources needed for the great stone fort that was being built at Churchill, and the danger of a French war, might delay the sending of an expedition, but that summer he told Richard Norton, chief factor at Churchill, to have the post's sloop ready to sail to the north the next year.¹ The reasons given to Norton for the proposed expedition were the possibility of settlement farther north and the increase of trade; and Dobbs' jubilant claim in a letter to Justice Ward in Ireland, 'I have got the Hudsons bay Company to undertake once more the northwest passage',² was premature.

For the rest of the year Dobbs and the Company worked independently of each other to obtain information about the west coast of the Bay. No one had a more intimate knowledge of the Bay than the Company's ship-captains, and Dobbs determined to approach one of them, Christopher Middleton, and seek his views on the possibility of a passage. Middleton's name was known to Dobbs only because the captain's observations on the variation of the magnetic needle had been published in the

¹ Committee to Norton, 2 May 1735. HBC A 6/5, f. 98v.

² Dobbs to Ward, 23 April 1735. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. V, p. 15.

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, and he knew nothing of Middleton's early enthusiasm for the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Since joining the Hudson's Bay Company in 1721 and wintering in the Bay with the intention of sailing north with Scroggs, Middleton had risen rapidly in the Company's service and in 1734 was given command of the Company's largest and newest vessel, the one hundred and seventy ton *Seahorse*. Three years later he achieved a distinction unusual for a sea captain when, in recognition of the quality of the several papers he had written, and his undoubted skill as a navigator, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.¹ When Dobbs met him in 1735 Middleton at once showed interest in his theories, and told him what he knew about the Company expeditions of the years 1719 to 1722, Knight's quest for gold, the Committee's reluctance to agree to the demands of its former Governor, and Scroggs' incapacity as a navigator. Middleton's position with the Company and his ready sympathy with Dobbs' plans made him an ideal ally, and he promised to seek further information at the Bay posts about the existence of a passage.

That autumn Dobbs wrote to Middleton from his home in Ireland, informing him that as there was less likelihood of a war with France he intended to remind the Company of its promise to fit out an expedition; and in April 1736 he sent Lake an outline of the instructions that he considered should be given to any discovery expedition on the west coast of the Bay. The search for a passage should not begin until latitude 64° N. was reached, and then the height and direction of the tide, and the presence of whales, should be carefully noted. 'And', wrote Dobbs, 'if they find an open Sea to Westward, after they pass 65° and the Land should fall away to Westward, and the Tide of Flood meets them . . . then the passage is gained'.² Dobbs

¹ The most important details of Middleton's career will be found in a short biographical sketch of the captain in E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson (eds.), *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743 and Notes and Observations on a Book entitled A Voyage to Hudsons Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749* (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1949 and London, The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949, XII), Appendix C, pp. 325-34.

² Dobbs to Lake, April 1736. Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 89.

was not to know that by this time the Committee had already decided to send an expedition northward from Churchill, and had also framed its instructions. Since the previous November a sub-committee had been studying journals of earlier expeditions along the west coast, and had questioned one of the men who had sailed with Scroggs in the *Whalebone*. On 11 March Richard Norton, who had returned to England the previous autumn, was reappointed chief factor at Churchill for five years, and promised a gratuity of £100 'in case he do Undertake such Voyages and Expeditions to the Nor'ward during his Stay in the Country as he shall be Ordered and directed by the Comp^a'.¹ A week later the expedition was again discussed and detailed instructions drawn up. Although Dobbs' letter was probably received in the meantime, no alteration was made in them when they were included in the general letter sent to Churchill in May.

The expedition was to consist of two sloops under the command of James Napper, and ten sailors were sent from England for two years to man them. The rest of the crew was to be made up by five Company servants already at Churchill, and three or four Home Indians. The sloops were to sail as far as the Welcome, find a base there for trading with the Eskimos, and bring back whale fins, ivory, seal skins and oil. The next year (1737) the sloops were to sail to that harbour again, where the crews were to renew their trade contacts, and also search for minerals. They were to stay there until the ship came from England on its yearly voyage—this would be about 24 July it was estimated—and then the three vessels were to sail as far north as possible, being 'very particular and exact in Sounding the depth of the Water, taking acco^t of the Current of the Tide, the Rise and fall at Ebb and high Water, and the distance of the time of Floods'.²

The Company's conception of discovery to the north differed radically from that of Dobbs. To Dobbs the main object was to test the tides and find the passage, with trade a legitimate but

¹ Committee Minutes, 11 March 1736. HBC A 1/144, f. 76v. The promise of a gratuity was the usual Company practice when any service outside routine business was required of an employee.

² Committee to Norton, 6 May 1736. HBC A 6/5, f. 109v.

secondary object. The Company reversed his order of priorities, and followed Kelsey's policy of fifteen years earlier. The first task of the northern expedition was to develop trade with the Eskimos and test for minerals. In 1736 exploration apart from this was not to be considered. Only in 1737, after the renewal of trade contacts with the Eskimos had been accomplished, were the sloops to attempt exploration farther north in company with the ship from England. The arrival of this vessel on the west coast at the specified time was by no means certain, for little time was allowed for delays, and Captain Coats in his orders of 1737 directing him to join the two sloops was warned, 'But on no account whatsoever to run any hazard with your Ship or endanger the looseing your passage to Churchill River and home this season'.¹ Only when vessels were based at Churchill, and could spend the whole of the short season exploring, was much progress made. Coats' ship had its normal run to Churchill to make after his explorations, and then out of the Bay before ice blocked the Strait. The sloops had their trading work to do before they were free to carry out explorations, so that even if the rendezvous went as planned there would be little time for the voyage farther north.

In fact there was no voyage to the north at all in 1736, because the ship carrying Norton and his instructions arrived late at Churchill, and the sloops were needed for unloading cargo. Nothing could have demonstrated more effectively the uncertainties afflicting expeditions so closely connected with the routine operations of the Company. Apart from the time factor, another handicap was the evident lack of enthusiasm at Churchill for exploration. Norton, in his youth one of the more venturesome of the Company servants, showed in his letters little liking for the northern expedition, despite the promised bonus. He maintained that the most northerly harbour he knew was Whale Cove in latitude 62°15' N., far to the south of the Welcome where Napper had originally been instructed to sail before contacting the natives; and it was there that he arranged for the

¹ Committee to Coats, 23 May 1737. *Ibid.*, f. 129r.

sloops to await the ship from England in 1737.¹ With the position for the rendezvous now fixed two hundred miles south of the area in which the search for the passage was to begin, the prospects for the next year did not look hopeful. It is possible that the thought of the lost Knight expedition lay heavily on the minds of those concerned with the expedition at Churchill, and explains the reluctance to venture north of Whale Cove. Certainly a note in the homeward letter that year indicated that the voyage was regarded as something out of the ordinary, calling for exceptional qualities of diligence and sobriety, for one Evans was sent home, 'a Sailor Entertain'd for the Northern Expedition, being Discontented, and we apprehend may prove A Seditious troublesome fellow Especially on such an Occasion'.²

Despite such precautions the 1737 expedition was a fiasco. The sloops edged their way north to Whale Cove, but there Napper died, and the vessels returned to Churchill. Norton expressed his feelings on the matter when he wrote home that autumn: 'And from the Success of their Expedition to the Northward we find noe Encouragement to Send the Sloops there Next Year, the coast being perrilous, No Rivers Navigable that they could meet with Nor noe woods and the Trade trifling and inconsiderable'.³ The Committee nevertheless ordered Norton to continue sending a sloop to Whale Cove each year, but for trading purposes only; and no mention was made of exploration and tidal observations. The venture was now unashamedly commercial, and the sloop-master and crew were to have ten per cent of the trade profits. Norton still showed considerable reluctance to promote even this modified expedition to the north, and in his last year at Churchill in 1740, on the plea that the threatened war with France made completion of the partly-built fort imperative, he laid aside the expedition altogether.

Dobbs received his first news of the failure of the 1737 expedition from Middleton, who had been at Churchill when the

¹ Norton to Committee, 17 Aug. 1736. HBC A 11/13, f. 30r.

² Ibid., f. 32r.

³ Norton to Committee, 23 Aug. 1737. Ibid., f. 40v.

sloops crept back from the north. He told Dobbs in confidence that the crews, 'not duly qualified for such an Undertaking', had only reached latitude 62°15' N., and had made no new discoveries. They had sighted many black whales, but the highest tide noted was only two fathoms, the flood coming from the north.¹ Dobbs, in reply, expressed disappointment that the expedition had achieved so little, but showed that optimism which characterized all his writings on the Northwest Passage. The presence of whales on the west coast of the Bay, together with the fact that the tide flowed from the north, convinced him that a thorough exploration of the region would reveal a passage to the Pacific. By this time, however, Dobbs was conscious of the Company's lack of enthusiasm for ventures not promising tangible commercial advantages, and he enquired whether Middleton or any of his friends would attempt a discovery voyage if the support of Sir Robert Walpole or Sir Charles Wager were obtained.²

At the same time Dobbs wrote to Lake and asked him what progress had been made in the discovery, and whether he might see extracts from the journals. Lake's reply, unaware as he was that Dobbs already knew certain details of the voyage, is illuminating. He informed Dobbs that the sloops had left Churchill 'very early in the Spring' (7 July was in fact the date of departure), but had not found 'the least Appearance of a Passage' although they had remained out until 22 August. He added that the Company could not consider ordering its unwilling sailors to undertake any expeditions similar to the recent one, 'which I assure you has been attended with the utmost Danger

¹ Middleton to Dobbs, 5 Nov. 1737. Dobbs, *Remarks*, pp. 90-1. Most of the correspondence between Dobbs and Middleton was printed in the books and pamphlets they each published during the controversy that followed the failure of Middleton's discovery expedition to Hudson Bay in 1741-2. These publications contain in their twelve hundred pages a confused collection of observations, correspondence and affidavits, thrown together in very little order—an 'abundance of rubbish and impertinence' commented the forthright Company captain, William Coats, at a later date—but when sifted, this material has provided a detailed picture of the way in which that expedition was conceived and carried out.

² Dobbs to Middleton, [20] Nov. 1737. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

of our Vessels and Mens Lives'.¹ The reluctance of the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company to venture any further is understandable. It was a matter for speculation whether a passage existed, and even if one were found, the effect on the comfortable Company monopoly might not be entirely beneficial. The Company had organized an expedition: that it had failed was not primarily the fault of the Committee in London, and it wanted to hear no more about such dangerous, unprofitable schemes. But the letter Lake sent Dobbs communicating this sentiment was likely to arouse his utmost resentment. It gave the impression that a thorough search for the passage had been made; Dobbs knew that the sloops had not sailed within two hundred miles of the Welcome. No mention was made of the vital tidal observations upon which Dobbs set such store, nor of the journals kept on the expedition. By under-estimating Dobbs' persistence and enthusiasm the Committee to some extent brought the troubles of the next twelve years upon its own head. Frustrated and opposed by the Company over this matter, Dobbs eventually turned his hostility against its monopoly, and he proved an able and unscrupulous opponent. It was an unlucky accident for the Company that the Northwest Passage, in which it had little interest at this time, was suspected to lie within its domains.

In his reply to Lake, Dobbs made it clear that he was not going to let the matter drop, and that he intended to apply to others, 'who I believe will undertake it chearfully, as they are convinced it will be a national Benefit'.² His aim now became the sending of a full-scale expedition to the Bay, and he wrote to Wager and Bladen informing them of the situation. He asked Wager whether two naval vessels might not be sent upon discovery, but in March 1738 the First Lord of the Admiralty replied in pessimistic terms. He had found few people who were interested in the question of the Northwest Passage, and al-

¹ Lake to Dobbs, 16 Dec. 1737. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4. This letter was apparently the only communication Dobbs ever received from the Company.

² Dobbs to Lake, n.d. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

though he agreed that there were strong reasons pointing to the existence of a passage he reminded Dobbs that 'Parliament may think . . . that we ought not to play with the Money they give us, for other and particular Services'.¹ He could only suggest that a private expedition might be sent to the Bay to search for a passage. If this were successful, the sponsors might form a company. In general, however, he shared the contemporary distrust of exclusive companies, and agreed with Dobbs that 'the Hudson's Bay Company do not desire to have any Body interfere with them in the Fur Trade in those Parts; they seem to be content with what they have, and make (I believe) considerable Profit by it'.²

After this discouragement little progress was made. Middleton, who was being eyed with increasing suspicion and disfavour by the Company, communicated regularly with Dobbs, and it was agreed that in the event of an expedition being fitted out Dobbs would recommend Middleton for its command. The possibility of an approach to the South Sea Company was considered and rejected, as was also a proposal that the government should be persuaded to offer a reward for the discovery of a passage. Dobbs had to overcome a problem which the promoters of earlier Arctic voyages rarely had to face. In the reigns of Elizabeth and James I ministers of state, merchants and geographers had shown a lively interest in the prospects of new settlements, increased trade and the extension of knowledge afforded by voyages of exploration; but over a century later Dobbs found that lack of interest and apathy were the customary reactions to projects of overseas discovery. Memories of the South Sea Bubble were not easily forgotten, and among the merchants of the land that adventurous ambition and readiness to invest in speculative ventures that had once been so marked a feature of English maritime enterprise seemed all but dead. Nor had the Admiralty yet come to consider the fitting out of discovery expeditions to be one of its normal responsibilities. In the peaceful years of Walpole's administration trade and ship-

¹ Wager to Dobbs, 4 March 1738. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

ping prospered, but others besides Dobbs chafed at complacency at home and the lack of spectacular achievement abroad. Defoe complained:

As for new Colonies and Conquests, how do we seem entirely to give over, even the Thoughts of them, tho' the Scene is so large, tho' the Variety is so great, and the Advantages so many? On the Contrary, we seem to forget the glorious Improvements of our Ancestors . . . as if we had done our utmost, were fully satisfied with what we have, that the enterprising Genius was buried with the old Discoverers, and there was neither Room in the World nor Inclination in our People to look any farther.¹

Other considerations also handicapped Dobbs in his search for support for his Northwest Passage project. He had met several influential merchants on his visits to London,² and he doubtless discussed with them the commercial possibilities of a passage; but they could not be expected to follow Wager's suggestion and finance an expedition to seek it, for as Dobbs himself had emphasized, the advantages accruing from the discovery of a passage would probably be confined to the Hudson's Bay Company. Only when the search for a passage became linked with an attack on the Company's monopoly could Dobbs command widespread merchant support for an expedition to the Bay.

In the autumn of 1739 Middleton returned from his yearly voyage to the Bay, and was dismayed to find vigorous preparations being made for war against Spain. This meant, he told Dobbs, that there was little likelihood of the government taking any action on Dobbs' proposals. The setback was the more frustrating because at Churchill that summer Norton had confirmed that while with Scroggs in 1722 he had observed the tide to rise five fathoms in the Welcome. When he went ashore on high ground, Norton continued, he saw the land fall away, and was convinced that there was a clear passage there. Moreover, natives had recently been at Churchill who claimed that they

¹ [Daniel Defoe], *A Plan of the English Commerce* (2nd edn., London, 1730), preface, pp. xiii–xiv.

² See Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, pp. 35, 45, 51.

had traded with Europeans on the west coast of America, additional proof to Middleton 'that the two Seas must unite'.¹ This information spurred Dobbs into activity, and in letters to Walpole and Wager he strove to turn the recent declaration of war with Spain to the benefit of his own scheme, pointing out that if a passage were discovered in 1740, then the following year naval ships could be sent through it into the Pacific to wreak havoc among the unprepared Spaniards. 'Our being capable of attacking them in the South Sea in so easy a Manner', concluded Dobbs, 'would soon humble them, and make them value our Friendship'.² But unknown to Dobbs, such a venture was already being planned, and although the route was more orthodox, the motives behind Anson's voyage were similar to those advanced by Dobbs in support of his Northwest Passage plan.³ With the Admiralty committed to sending squadrons of ships to the West Indies with Vernon and round the world with Anson, Wager's reluctance to hazard vessels and men on a minor expedition to Hudson Bay is understandable; and in London Middleton was faced with a tedious period of waiting at Court and at the great houses in the hope that he might find some opportunity of raising the subject of the Northwest Passage.

At the beginning of 1740 Dobbs wrote again to Walpole and Wager, this time introducing the bogey of French intervention if the discovery were not made that year—'by delaying it, I'm afraid lest France should get the Scent, and anticipate our Discovery'⁴—but all, apparently, to no avail. Although Wager was usually accessible, and expressed his personal agreement with

¹ Middleton to Dobbs, 18 Oct. 1739. Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 109.

² Dobbs to Wager, 30 Oct. 1739. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³ Cf. Richard Walter (comp.), *A Voyage round the World in the years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV*, by George Anson (London, 1748), p. 2: 'When in the latter end of the summer of 1739, it was foreseen that a war with Spain was inevitable, it was the opinion of several considerable persons then trusted with the Administration of affairs, that the most prudent step the Nation could take, on the breaking out of the war, was attacking that Crown in her distant settlements; for by this means . . . it was supposed that we should cut off the principal resources of the enemy, and reduce them to the necessity of sincerely desiring a peace.'

⁴ Dobbs to Wager, 23 Jan. 1740. Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 121.

the plans put before him, he said he could do nothing without Walpole; but when Middleton finally spoke to the busy Sir Robert at his levee, he was told he must speak to Wager on the subject! It was clear that there would be no expedition that year, and Middleton prepared to sail once more to the Bay in the Company's service, pointedly informing Dobbs that his presence in London the next winter would do much to facilitate matters. At the beginning of May he wrote a farewell note to Dobbs before sailing, but added a postscript which showed that there had been a dramatic change in the situation. Wager had just spoken to George II about the project, 'and his Majesty seemed to approve it very well, and said the Expence was such a Trifle, that it should not be obstructed on that Account; so that Sir Charles is of Opinion that it will be put in Execution next Year without much Difficulty'.¹ Wager at last had the higher authority without which he had refused to move. Dobbs and Middleton had been faced with indifference and scepticism in official quarters, but with royal patronage, however casually bestowed, for the venture, this obstacle had been overcome; and in December 1740 Middleton wrote to Dobbs that Wager had confirmed that there would be an expedition the following spring.

Early in 1741 Dobbs came to London to be on hand during the preparations for the discovery expedition, though Middleton cautiously insured himself against another change of attitude on Wager's part by saying nothing to the Hudson's Bay Company about the proposed venture. Throughout January and February he and the two other captains, Coats and Spurrell, were busy preparing the Company ships for their annual voyage to the Bay. Then, on 5 March came the long-awaited award of a commission in the navy, and four days later the expedition to Hudson Bay was formally approved when Wager, at a meeting of the Admiralty Board, 'signify'd the King's Pleasure that one of the Bomb Vessels should be fitted out for a Voyage to the

¹ Middleton to Dobbs, 1 May 1740. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Northward, and that Mr Christopher Middleton should have the Command of her who is very well acquainted with those Seas.¹ On the same day the Deputy Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company informed the Committee of Middleton's resignation, and it was decided that it would not be possible to send the *Hudson's Bay* on her regular voyage that year.²

For Middleton the next two months passed in a flurry of activity as he settled his accounts with the Company that he had served for twenty years, and supervised the preparation of his new command, the *Furnace*, for the voyage ahead. With the various Admiralty departments unfamiliar with northern conditions, initiative was left largely in his hands, and in a letter to the Navy Board he detailed the alterations he considered should be made to his command. The *Furnace* was one of six bomb-vessels built in the summer of 1740, but in September she had been converted into a sloop, intended mainly for Channel service. The strength of her construction, with stout timbers designed to withstand the battering recoil of heavy mortars, made her well fitted for Arctic work; but her limited storage capacity meant that with only four months' provisions on board her scuppers would be in the water, while her deep waist might prove a dangerous weakness on the long voyage. Middleton accordingly gave instructions for the sloop to be raised two feet fore and aft, and another deck laid that would provide additional room for men and provisions, and make the vessel 'more Wholesom in the Sea'. His wishes concerning boats (particularly an ice-boat, an essential part of the equipment of Hudson Bay and Greenland ships), navigational instruments, and provisions, were all met. Again, his Hudson Bay experience was invaluable, and after he had informed the Admiralty of the special provisions required

¹ Admiralty Board Minutes, 9 March 1741. Adm 3/45, f. 51r. (Naval affairs at this time were controlled by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, who formed the Board of Admiralty and met several times a week. The Board of Admiralty was assisted by several subsidiary boards with special responsibilities. The most important of these boards was the Navy Board, which supervised the royal dockyards and the building, fitting, and repairing of ships.)

² Committee Minutes, 9 March 1741. HBC A 1/35, pp. 145-6.

for crews in the icy waters of the north additional allowances of sugar, butter, brandy and strong beer were provided.¹

Towards the end of April the Navy Board reported that it had bought, after consulting Middleton, a one hundred and fifty ton pink as a consort for the *Furnace*. 'She appears', the Board commented, 'to be sound and Strong, and is a proper Vessel, when fitted, for the Service she is intended for.'² The pink was renamed the *Discovery*, and William Moor was appointed master and Edward Thompson surgeon. Both were Hudson's Bay Company men, as was Robert Wilson, second mate of the *Furnace*, and all three were to have sailed with Middleton that year on the *Hudson's Bay*. Middleton obtained the services of three or four others who had sailed on Company ships, but outside this handful of experienced men there appears to have been little enthusiasm for the voyage among the petty officers and tradesmen allocated to the discovery vessels. Two carpenters reported on board, but left on hearing their destination. Nor did the surgeon appointed to the *Furnace* make the voyage. Edward Thompson was moved to the sloop, 'notwithstanding his Qualification is only for a Surgeon's Mate', another surgeon's mate was made surgeon of the *Discovery*, and both were excused their examinations.³

Such appointments indicate the acute manpower shortage in the wartime navy which made Middleton's task of getting together the rest of his crew a depressing one. When he took over the *Furnace* in March there were forty men already on board, but six of them had to be sent immediately to sick quarters at Woolwich. As a precaution against desertion the rest were put on board a depot ship while the *Furnace* was being refitted at Deptford. Three of these zealously guarded men were taken ill

¹ Details in this paragraph from correspondence in Adm 2/57, Adm 2/202, Adm 1/2099, ADM/B/114; and from a plan of the *Furnace* at the National Maritime Museum, No. 4312/61.

² Navy Board to Admiralty, 23 April 1741. ADM/B/114. The same day Dobbs wrote to Justice Ward describing the tender as 'a strong new built collier'. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. V, p. 131.

³ Details from lists of crews of the two discovery ships in Adm 1/2099; also letter Admiralty to Navy Board, 28 May 1741. Adm 2/202, p. 276.

within a few days, and 'most of the others', the Admiralty complained to Middleton, 'look ailing, having scarce any Cloths'.¹ Apart from these scarecrows Middleton had to take what he could get by way of a press warrant, and at a time when the press gangs were in the streets examining everyone 'who has the Appearance of a Seaman',² few of the men he was able to pick up could have been suitable for the arduous voyage ahead. Middleton's crews were very different in health and spirit from the splendid volunteers who sailed with the Arctic explorers of the next century, and if he was not encumbered with pensioners as Anson was, many of his men were in poor shape even before the ships left England. This difficulty in finding crews meant that it was impossible for the expedition to make an early start for the Bay, and on 21 May, by which time Middleton had hoped to have been near the Orkneys, the *Furnace* still had few of her men on board, while on the *Discovery* Moor had to borrow ten hands from another ship to take the pink down river to join the *Furnace* at Gallion's Reach.

To add to Middleton's difficulties, the Hudson's Bay Company showed an understandable reluctance to assist an expedition which, the Governor warned shareholders in April, 'might affect their Property and be Prejudicial to the Company in their Trade'.³ The Committee's fear that the Middleton expedition might in some way harm the Bay trade led to a heated exchange of letters between it and various government departments which demonstrated that dislike of exclusive companies was not confined to interloping merchants. In reply to an Admiralty request that full assistance should be given Middleton by the Bay posts, the Committee agreed only to send an order to its most northerly post at Churchill for help to be offered should Middleton 'by inevitable necessity be brought into real distress and danger of his Life or loss of his Ship'.⁴ The Committee, fully aware of the

¹ Admiralty to Middleton, 14 March 1741. Adm 2/473, p. 172.

² *London Evening Post*, 3 March 1741.

³ General Court Minutes, 9 April 1741. HBC A 2/1, f. 55r.

⁴ Admiralty to HBC, 6 May 1741. Adm 2/473, p. 376. Committee Minutes, 13 May 1741. HBC A 1/35, p. 190.

implications of the expedition, was refusing to treat it as a purely scientific voyage of discovery, and asked Wager to order Middleton not to sail south of Cape Digges at the western entrance of Hudson Strait, interfere with the Company's trade and ships, or winter at any of its posts unless in grave danger.¹ Sir Bibye Lake was, in effect, trying to persuade the Admiralty to apply the same restrictions to Middleton's ships as he himself had clamped on the Knight expedition twenty-two years earlier. Dobbs had always emphasized the commercial importance of the quest for a passage, and in turn the Company showed all the cautiousness of a trading organization that had remained in undisturbed possession of Hudson Bay since 1714. If a Northwest Passage were discovered the Company could do little to prevent ships which passed through Hudson Bay indulging in illicit trade; and the cherished charter might prove only a frail bulwark against merchants eager to develop trade west of the Bay. Dobbs had in fact already obtained from the Attorney-General the opinion that the Company, despite its charter, 'had no Right to an exclusive Trade, but every Merchant in England had an equal Right to trade there'.²

Middleton, on the other hand, was determined to force from the Company an order permitting him to winter at one of its posts, for with his intimate knowledge of the Bay and Strait he knew that there was little possibility of returning to England that year. Either he must winter on the Pacific coast of North America, or in Hudson Bay; and the fate of Munk and Knight warned of the dangers of wintering in an unprepared spot in the Bay. Only at one of the Company forts could he find adequate shelter from the severity of the Bay winter, and when he wrote to the Admiralty protesting about the Company's attitude he asked that the Committee should be requested to give 'more satisfactory Directions'.³ Wager had already admitted that he

¹ HBC to Admiralty, 27 May 1741, printed in Middleton, *A Reply to the Remarks of Arthur Dobbs* (London, 1744), Appendix, pp. 4-7.

² Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 60.

³ Middleton to Admiralty, 12 May 1741. Adm 1/2099.

was no great supporter of chartered companies, and in letters to the Duke of Newcastle and the Regency Council he vigorously attacked the Company for its unhelpful attitude, 'very unbecoming', he told Newcastle, 'a Company who subsist by his Majestys favour, having only an old Charter which no doubt they have made several breaches in'.¹ The days when the Company had powerful friends in the government and at the court were long past, and faced with the disapproval of the Regency Council, and a frigid note from the Admiralty in which it was informed that its conduct lay outside the bounds of civilized usage,² the Committee capitulated and gave Middleton a brief order for the Bay factors: 'Notwithstanding our former Orders to you, if Capt. Middleton, who is sent abroad in the Government's service to discover a Passage to the North-West, should be obliged to resort to you, you are to give him the best Assistance in your Power'.³ Terse and somewhat ungracious though the order was, it was sufficient for Middleton's purpose.

While engaged in these skirmishes with his old employers, and with the *Furnace* still only manned by a skeleton crew, the harassed Middleton had received his sailing orders from the Admiralty. They were similar in principle to those which Dobbs in 1736 had suggested should be given to the Company's northern expedition from Churchill, and he was probably responsible for drafting at least the navigational part of Middleton's instructions.⁴ When he reached the Bay, Middleton was to sail to Ne Ultra and search for the flood-tide coming from the west near Whalebone Point in latitude 65° N. This was the name given by Scroggs to a cape he saw three leagues distant from his anchored sloop at the most northerly point of his discovery

¹ Wager to Newcastle, 17 May 1741. S.P. Dom. 42/81, p. 388. See also Admiralty to Regency Council, 25 May 1741. Adm 2/473, p. 443.

² Admiralty to HBC, 29 May 1741. Adm 2/473, p. 473. See also Regency Council Minutes, 26 May 1741. S.P. Dom. 43/103.

³ 30 May 1741. Printed in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1749, p. 5.

⁴ Cf. Middleton, *Vindication*, p. 6; Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 12.

voyage of 1722. There, whales were sighted, Norton reported a clear sea to the southwest, and the flood-tide was so powerful that when the *Whalebone* approached the eastern coast of the Welcome, Scroggs had to anchor to prevent his sloop being driven on shore. Both Dobbs and Middleton were convinced that somewhere in that region lay a passage into the western ocean.

Once through the passage Middleton was to explore carefully the western coast of America, make alliances with the native inhabitants, and take possession of all lands in the King's name. Unless he decided to winter on the west coast he was instructed to sail no farther south than latitude 50° N., but to return, wintering either in Hudson Bay or sailing back to England. The unreasoning optimism of this part of Middleton's orders also points to Dobbs as their originator. Middleton was informed that Anson was expected to be off California by December, and was told to meet him there if he intended to winter on the Pacific coast. If he did not encounter Anson, then he was to find an island 'that may be of use for a future settlement' and winter there; but if at any time he fell in with Japanese ships, or ships trading to the countries east of Japan, he was 'to proceed no farther in the Discovery, but immediately to return, that Ships of Sufficient Force may be sent out next Season to begin a Trade, or make a Settlement without any Apprehension or Disturbance from any powerfull Nation on that Side'.¹

This part of Middleton's instructions has a deeper significance than those sections devoted to navigational directions; it anticipates the policy of the Admiralty in the next reign, when naval vessels ranged the Pacific in search of bases and new markets for British goods. Middleton's voyage marks one of the first tentative steps towards this policy, for his orders make it clear that his expedition was but a pathfinder, and that if he found a navigable passage the Admiralty would consider further measures to secure his discovery. Under the initial protection of

¹ Admiralty to Middleton, 20 May 1741. Adm 2/57, p. 100.

'Ships of Sufficient Force', British merchants would be able to reap the benefit of the short cut to the western shores of America, and pass on to the rich lands confidently expected to lie beyond.

The Voyage of Christopher Middleton: Controversy and Inquiry

EARLY in the morning of 8 June 1741 the *Furnace* and *Discovery* weighed anchor at the Nore, and stood northeast past the low-lying Essex coast. Few among the casual onlookers who watched the departure could have been aware that they were witnessing an historic occasion, that the two ungainly vessels pitching in the short, choppy waves of the open estuary were the forerunners of a series of naval expeditions which would leave England to seek, and eventually find, the Northwest Passage. No touch of ceremony marked the occasion, and the brief, confused comments with which a few newspapers favoured the expedition reflected the general lack of interest in the enterprise.¹ Nor would Middleton have welcomed an elaborate leave-taking: far more to the point would have been fifty good seamen in exchange for the forty-three ragamuffins he had been forced to accept from a transit ship to make up his complement. He had other worries too. Acutely conscious of the limited season for navigation in the Bay, he had hoped to sail on 10 May (the Company ships had left before the end of April), and now, impatient to make up lost time, he ignored his orders to call at Leith for a convoy and instead sailed direct for the Orkneys.

On the passage across the North Atlantic Middleton's much altered sloop handled surprisingly well, but the slower moving *Discovery* constantly fell behind, and references to taking the tender in tow or shortening sail to wait for her became routine entries in the log of the *Furnace*. Although there was less ice

¹ E.g. *London Evening Post*, 21 May 1741: 'The Furnace Bomb-Ketch, that is design'd for the Discovery of the North-East [sic] Passage . . .'; *Daily Post*, 3 June 1741: 'The Furnace and Discovery, bound to Russia [sic] to find out a North-West Passage to India . . .'

than usual in Hudson Strait and the ships passed through it in six days, Carys Swan Nest was not reached until the end of July. There, with the ships slowly groping their way westward in thick fog, Middleton called a council of officers to consider the situation, and their lengthy report illustrates the difficulties confronting Arctic explorers at a time when techniques of wintering in the ice in specially strengthened ships had not been perfected. It shows also the reason for Middleton's insistence that permission should be obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company for the discovery vessels to winter at one of its posts. The council, composed mainly of experienced ex-Company men, decided that in view of the comparative lateness of the season and the uncertainty of the weather a wintering place should be found where the ships could be secured out of reach of the ice, and shelter found for the crews and provisions before the severe frosts of September set in. Accordingly, the council resolved that 'it would be the best and surest Method for the Service in general, to proceed directly for Churchill River . . . and to wait the breaking up of the Ice next Year, and then to attempt the Discovery of a passage from Hud^s Bay to the South Sea'.¹ The delay in leaving England, and fear of the Bay winter, meant that the 1741 season had been wasted. Such explorations as the expedition now made would have to be hurriedly carried out during the short summer season of the following year, and would be limited by the running down of provisions and by the necessity of getting well clear of Hudson Bay and Strait before the ice closed in during September.

A week after the council's decision Robert Pilgrim, in command at Churchill until James Isham arrived from York, was startled to find two strange craft lying off the fort. The discovery vessels were the first non-Company ships to have been seen in the Bay for nearly thirty years, and only after the firing of a warning shot and an exchange of wary formalities under cover of a white flag was Middleton's lieutenant, John Rankin, allowed to approach near enough to the fort to hand Pilgrim the

¹ Middleton Journal, 31 July 1741. Adm 51/379, Pt. I, f. 26r.

Company's revised orders concerning the expedition. These had the effect Middleton desired, for Pilgrim interpreted them as 'your Honours new Orders to admitt Capt. Middleton &c to come here'.¹ Nevertheless, an arduous period lay ahead before the expedition could face the winter with any confidence. Middleton had hoped to billet his men in the old fort, which had served from Knight's day to the early 'thirties, and he was disagreeably surprised to find that since his last visit it had been pulled down, and was 'nothing but a Heap of rubbish'. Its ruins had to be made inhabitable, wood collected for fuel, the ships unloaded and unrigged, and docks dug in the frozen ground where they could lie for the winter out of the reach of loose ice driven in by the tide.

On 16 August Isham arrived from York to take command of the post, and with the expedition already preparing its winter quarters he had little alternative but to accept its presence and offer Middleton what help he could. He put his bricklayer to work repairing the stoves at the old fort, allotted quarters in the new fort to Middleton's officers and a few of his men, and sent to York for beaver coats for the discovery crews. For his part, Middleton loaned the factor the services of his cooper, armourer and carpenter. In the heat of the controversy that followed the return of the expedition to England, Middleton was criticized for letting his men work for the Company which had sought to deny him shelter, while Isham's journal was carefully inspected by the Committee, all instances in it of help to Middleton underlined, and in one place an unfavourable comment appended.² On the bleak shores of the Bay relations between the two tiny communities of Englishmen appeared in a different light, and Middleton and Isham, who had known each other for some years and shared similar scientific interests, were applying the only sensible policy when they agreed to pool their limited resources.

¹ Churchill Journal, 8 Aug. 1741. HBC B 42/a/23, f. 4v.

² See Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 50; Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, introduction, p. lxxix. Details of Isham's career with the Hudson's Bay Company are to be found *ibid.*, pp. 318-25.

Two major problems confronted Middleton. First, his ships had to be docked before the river and sea froze; and twenty men were set to work with spades, pickaxes and gunpowder digging and blasting a dock in ground 'near as hard as portland Stone, and Scarce to be enter'd with pickaxes'.¹ Throughout the first fortnight of September the crews toiled day and night in showers of hail and snow until the two ships were secure in the dock and weighted down with ballast. The second problem remained, and eventually proved the more serious. To ward off attacks of scurvy the Company men supplemented the provisions sent from England with fresh meat in the form of partridges, wild geese and cariboux. Even under normal conditions the addition of ninety men to the regular garrison of forty would have proved a considerable problem, but this winter it was far greater because the retiring factor, Richard Norton, had given the Indians on whose hunting abilities the garrison were largely dependent so much ammunition that there was no need for them to come to the fort. Consequently, there were only a few Indian lads at Churchill, and although they and some of the Company men were sent out daily to shoot partridges, their meagre haul did not go far when divided between the two communities.

Lack of suitable clothing was another difficulty. The factor at York could spare no beaver coats, and evidently the ships' slops were of little use in the Arctic conditions, for Isham noted that many of the crews had 'no wearing Apperall for this Country'.² Although they could not be provided with the warm, fur-lined clothes that the Company men wore, Isham helped out with cloth and blanket to the best of his ability, and Middleton was duly appreciative. No doubt he was also uncomfortably aware of the irony of a situation in which an expedition, whose success might jeopardize the Company's position in the Bay, could

¹ Middleton Journal, 2 Sept. 1741. Adm 51/379, Pt. I, f. 34r. Although Churchill lies in the same latitude as the Orkneys, its climate is Arctic in character. The prevailing wind is from the north, while Hudson Bay forms a repository for the cold currents and ice entering through Foxe Channel and Hudson Strait.

² Churchill Journal, 25 Oct. 1741. HBC B 42/a/23, f. 14r.

survive only with the help provided by one of the Company posts.

Before the end of September temperatures had dropped as low as those during the great frost in England two years earlier. On 11 October a practical demonstration of the intensity of the cold occurred when the celebrations of the King's birthday, enthusiastically carried out with cannon booming, colours flying, and the drinking of patriotic toasts, were interrupted by the sad discovery that 'the Wine, with which the Officers drank the aforesaid Healths, and which was good port wine, froze in the Glass as soon as pour'd out of the Bottle'.¹ By the end of October ice covered the Bay as far as the eye could see, and in places around the fort the snow lay ten or twelve feet deep. Even in Middleton's room, where there was always a fire, and red-hot shot hanging at the windows, liquids froze solid, and the captain had to keep his watch in bed each night to protect it from the frost. For a time the crews endured the unaccustomed cold, but in the first week of January cases of scurvy were reported at the old fort. Several sufferers were brought five miles through deep snow to the new fort where they were tended by the surgeon Thompson, but the number of those afflicted grew. By the beginning of February twenty-five men were ill, and as Middleton tried desperately to get fresh provisions he was himself taken ill with fever and fainting fits. The condition of the men at the old fort worsened. In the journals there is no mention of who was in charge there: Middleton, Moor and Rankin were all at the new fort, and lack of leadership and discipline was probably responsible for much of the illness at the old fort. Middleton only once mentions going there, and Shaw, the unqualified and probably inexperienced surgeon of the *Discovery*, was in charge of the sick. The issue of generous allowances of brandy seemed a simple way of keeping the men warm and happy, but the half-pint daily ration of spirits, together with the potent punch brewed on the several festive occasions in the early part of the winter, contributed to the onset of scurvy in the New Year.

¹ Middleton Journal, 11 Oct. 1741. Adm 51/379, Pt. II, p. 13.

Altogether, ten men died of scurvy during the winter, and many others were enfeebled or had toes amputated after frost-bite. There was some truth in Dobbs' assertion, 'it was wintering there that broke the Spirits of the Men. They had a . . . most miserable slavish Life';¹ and this weakening of the crews, although it makes the explorations of the following summer the more praiseworthy, must in part be attributed to lack of control by Middleton.

At the beginning of April the Company men came back from the woods where they had spent a rigorous but healthy winter hunting, fishing, and felling timber. To make room for them the discovery crews went back on board the ships after fires had been lit for a week to thaw the ice inside the cabins, and a start was made to cutting the vessels free. An entry in Middleton's journal shows that this was no light task: 'The Ship is bedded round wth. Ice and Snow up to her top and Quarter Rails. She appears more like a lump of Ice than a Ship'.² The cold was still so intense that the men were numbed after digging for an hour, and ten or twelve had not yet recovered from scurvy. Then, in May, the ice began to break up, and the passing over Churchill of flights of white geese on their yearly migration to the north showed that the long winter had finally ended. Their arrival also meant that the men could at last be given fresh meat, and their health quickly improved.

For a time, the co-operation of the previous fall between Middleton and Isham continued. The two small Company boats plied backwards and forwards loading the discovery vessels, the armourer of the *Furnace* repaired hunting guns for Isham, while

¹ Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 50. At the same time as this, Anson's crews were dying from scurvy in numbers that almost defy belief. On the *Centurion*, *Gloucester* and *Tryal* 626 men died out of a complement of 961; although it should be remembered that the proportion of invalid pensioners and raw marines on board contributed to this appalling mortality rate. Also during this winter Vitus Bering's crew was being decimated by scurvy on an island near the coast of Kamchatka, and 31 out of a crew of 71 died, including Bering himself. The Russians, however, had not the advantage of wintering in partly prepared quarters, with help close at hand, as had Middleton's men.

² Middleton Journal, 7 April 1742. Adm 51/379, Pt. II, f. 111.

Middleton continued to live at the new fort and prevented any of his men trading with the Indians who were bringing down furs to the post. But destruction of Company property by some of Middleton's sailors, and the 'alluring' by the captain (as the indignant Isham expressed it) of five of the Company servants to join the expedition, led to tension between the two men; and there is no evidence to support the accusation made by Dobbs after the return of the ships to England, that Middleton and Isham had conspired to defeat the purpose of the expedition. The truth lies rather in Isham's plaintive plea to the Committee that year, that as Middleton had been 'a Very Troublesome Guess [sic], I Humbly Desire if any Ships Comes again to winter, Your Hon^{rs} will please to send a More fuller Order in What manner to Acct'.¹

By the end of June the ships were ready for sea, and on the first day of July set sail in company with the *Churchill* sloop. The discovery vessels soon parted company with the sloop, which was bound on a trading voyage along the west coast of the Bay, and sailed northeast into waters unknown to the Company sloopers. The *Furnace* sounded as she went, and Middleton several times tested the tide, but Moor's journal shows that the *Discovery* was already in some distress: 'Now we cannot spare time to Sound for What with Making and Short^{ng} Sail for the Furnace, and then being so badly Mann'd'.² As the ships headed for latitude 65° N. where, according to Middleton's instructions, the search proper was to begin, they were repeatedly held up by the ice blocking the *Welcome*, and the captains had to call upon all their long experience of Bay navigation to push a way through the drifting field. Slowly and cautiously the ships were warped and towed through openings in the ice, until on 12 July they passed Whalebone Point, the farthest north of previous explorers, and sighted a headland in latitude 65°10' N. which Middleton named Cape Dobbs in honour of his 'worthy friend'. Behind the cape appeared an inlet, and the ships headed for

¹ Isham to Committee, July 1742. HBC A 11/13, f. 76r.

² Moor Journal, 5 July 1742. Adm 51/290, Pt. IX.

this to escape the danger of ice in the Welcome. The inlet, named the Wager by Middleton after the First Lord of the Admiralty, proved both a haven and a trap, because great masses of ice drove into it from the Welcome. For three weeks the ships lay at anchor waiting for the ice to clear, and within a few days Middleton was noting in his journal that the return of salt meat had led to a renewed outbreak of scurvy among the crew.

Although Middleton was convinced that the Wager was only an inlet or river, he took the opportunity that the delay afforded to examine it. In all, four boat expeditions were sent out, two under Lieutenant Rankin, one under Rankin and the master Robert Wilson, and one under Middleton himself. In view of the subsequent controversy about the Wager, claimed by some to be one of the entrances to the Northwest Passage, the logs of Middleton, Moor and Rankin have been carefully examined and compared. Nowhere do they suggest that the officers considered the Wager to be anything but a river or inlet. The most extensive explorations were carried out by the final expedition under Rankin and Wilson, who sailed far up the Wager. On their return Middleton noted that they had sighted many whales, but that the flood-tide came from the east, and that water in a bottle which Rankin had filled at the most westerly point the boat had reached in the Wager was barely brackish.¹ Moor added in his log that as the boat turned back it 'came within 3 or 4 Miles of a Fall of Water or something else which made a Great Noise';² and a report signed by Rankin and Wilson on their return affirmed that 'we saw a great Run or Fall of Water between the suppos'd main Land and the aforesaid Islands, very narrow, seemingly not a Mile broad and about a League from where the Boat lay; but to the northwards we discovered a large Collection of Water, in which were several Islands'.³

Dobbs later contended that this run of water was the flood-

¹ Middleton Journal, 1 Aug. 1742. Adm 51/379, Pt. II, f. 41r. Middleton Log, *ibid.*, Pt. III, f. 16r. ² Moor Log, 1 Aug. 1742. Adm 51/290, Pt. X.

³ Report by Rankin and Wilson, 1 Aug. 1742. Printed in Middleton, *Vindication*, pp. 110-11.

tide from the Pacific, and that Middleton had deliberately ignored the portents of a passage. It is true that Middleton made preparations to leave the Wager immediately he received the report from Rankin and Wilson, but this decision was dictated by the ever-present time factor, and by the news that the ice at the entrance of the Wager was clearing. If Middleton had a lengthy navigable season in front of him, he might perhaps have explored the Wager to its farthest extent, investigated the 'large Collection of Water', and sought an explanation for the presence of whales in the river's upper reaches. But it was already the beginning of August, and only another three or four weeks remained for exploration. It is evident that Middleton, hoping from day to day that the ice blocking the entrance of the Wager would drift away, was reluctant to send his boats on long surveys of indefinite duration once he was certain that the Wager was not a strait. As he pointed out, it was futile to seek a passage against the ebb, and his main concern was to investigate the unknown Welcome rather than carry out time-consuming explorations of only academic interest in the recesses of the Wager.

In the first week of August the ice at the entrance began to thin, and on 4 August the ships sailed clear of the mouth of the Wager and headed northeast up the Welcome in waters never previously explored. Two or three black whales were sighted, and Middleton noted that the flood-tide came from the east and northeast. The strait narrowed to eight or nine leagues in width, and the tide ran so strong that the ships would hardly steer. The strength and direction of the tide, and the sighting of whales (Dobbs' guides, Middleton later called them), seemed to indicate that the entrance to the long-sought passage was close at hand, but the next day brought a sad disillusionment:

At 4 in the Afternoon set a fair Cape or Headland in the West or N^o Shore . . . The Land trenching away from the EbN to the NbW making 8 Points Difference, gives us great Joy and hopes of it's being the extream Part of America, on which Account I named it C. Hope. We work'd up round it through much Stragling Ice all

Night. In the Morning when the Sun cleared away the Haze, to our great Disappointment we saw the Land from the Low Beach quite round to the Westward of the North which met the Western Shore and makes a very deep Bay. Thus our Hopes of a Passage that way were all over.¹

The question asked by Foxe, and then Dobbs, had finally been answered. The Welcome, although stretching farther to the north than the maps indicated, was not the entrance of the Northwest Passage; and Middleton, in his disappointment, named its northern extremity Repulse Bay.

The ships worked their way round the desolate shores of the bay to make certain there was no opening, but found a continuous coastline and still, tideless waters. On his way out of the bay Middleton landed on the eastern shore to find the source of the strong flood-tide driving down the Welcome that had given rise to such high expectations. He discovered that it flowed into the Welcome from the southeast through a strait twenty miles wide in places which was still choked by ice. This channel Middleton named Frozen Strait, and since it was clear that even if the ice in it did break up, by then the navigable season would be over, a council of Middleton and his officers decided to return, inspecting the coast from Cape Dobbs to Brook Cobham on the way south for signs of an opening.

For this final stage of the search there was little enthusiasm. An examination of the logs shows that the *Furnace* and *Discovery* kept at least three leagues off the land, and Middleton, like Foxe more than a century earlier, mistook the entrance of Chesterfield Inlet, masked by its screen of sheltering islands, for a deep bay. Sickness and disillusionment among officers and crews clearly made them reluctant to examine at close quarters the menacing and rock-strewn coast,² and by 12 August the

¹ Middleton Log, 6 Aug. 1742. Adm 51/379, Pt. III, f. 18v.

² 'The northern portion of the western side of Hudson Bay, between Cape Fullerton and Eskimo Point, about 235 miles southwestward, is rocky and much indented by large bays. The shore is fringed with islets and rocks for a considerable distance offshore; navigation off this coast is endangered by out-lying shoals and strong tidal streams'. *Labrador and Hudson Bay Pilot 1954* (Canadian Hydrographic Service, Surveys and Mapping Branch, Ottawa, 1955), p. 298.

ships were off Brook Cobham, renamed Marble Island by Middleton because of its appearance. There the ships watered, and the tide was tested. The flood was found to come from the east, and with this final discouraging observation, and most of the crew 'very much distemper'd', Middleton decided to bear away for England. As the ships left the island, where the grim relics of Knight's expedition still awaited discovery, Moor tersely summed up in his journal the significance of the season's explorations: 'there is no Passage into the other Ocean between Churchill and the Latit^d 67° N.'¹

After a gruelling voyage to the Orkneys, during which another man died, and at times there were only two seamen on the *Furnace* capable of taking the wheel, Middleton wrote to Dobbs informing him of his failure to find a passage. In his correspondence with the Admiralty after the expedition's arrival in the Thames at the beginning of October more emerged about the difficulties with which Middleton, accustomed to the volunteer crews of the Company ships, was confronted in the handling of his motley crew:

no Ship was ever pester'd with such a Set of Rogues, most of them having deserv'd hanging before they enter'd with me, and not three Seamen among the whole Number of private Men, so that had it not been for the Officers, who, every one of them, work'd like common Men, I should have found no little Difficulty to get the Ships to England.²

Middleton's strictures on his crew were perhaps too harsh. Many of them rallied to his defence when his conduct of the expedition was questioned, but certainly few of them were fitted, either in health or disposition, for so arduous a voyage. It was with a ragged and unenthusiastic crew that Middleton carried out his explorations in the summer of 1742, and under these circumstances they were of creditable extent. His map of the expedition's discoveries, published in 1743, was the first attempt at an accurate survey of the west coast of Hudson Bay,

¹ Moor Journal, 15 Aug. 1742. Adm 51/290, Pt. IX.

² Middleton to Admiralty, 16 Oct. 1742. Adm 1/2099.

and was a striking advance on the rough sketches of the region produced by earlier cartographers. Though on a small scale and not showing the detail which a close examination of the coast would have revealed, it included all the main features of the west coast of the Bay except Chesterfield Inlet, and parts of it have stood well the tests applied by later explorers.¹

The surveys made by Middleton's expedition, then, were more conclusive than any previously carried out in Hudson Bay, for they seemed to have closed the last significant gap on the map of the Bay. Moreover, the discovery of a strong tide racing from the north through Frozen Strait, and along the west coast of the Bay, explained the unusual height of the tides observed by earlier explorers near the Welcome. Dobbs was still curious about the source of that tide, but from his home in Ireland he told Middleton in November 1742 that he agreed that no passage navigable for shipping existed west of Hudson Bay, and that consequently he saw no point in coming to London that winter.² His enthusiasm for the discovery of a passage was evidently being replaced by interest in another project. Even before Middleton's expedition had left in 1741, Dobbs had told Judge Ward that he intended 'to see if we can't open the Trade' of Hudson Bay,³ and during the expedition's absence he had started to compile, with the help of Company journals surreptitiously procured for him by Middleton, a work on Hudson Bay which contained a bitter attack on the Company, and was eventually published in 1744.

Dobbs outlined the scope of the book to Middleton, and described his plans to penetrate southward from the Bay, secure the navigation of the Great Lakes, and cut French communications with the Mississippi. In reply, Middleton pointed

¹ See e.g. W. E. Parry, *Journal of a Second Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean* (London, 1824), I, p. 54.

² The letters written by Dobbs and Middleton to each other during the winter of 1742-3 were printed in Middleton, *Vindication*, pp. 114-34.

³ Dobbs to Ward, 23 April 1741. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. V, p. 131.

out some of the flaws in Dobbs' sweeping schemes, but before receiving the letter containing these discouraging observations, Dobbs had studied Middleton's journal (a full copy of which the captain had just sent him) and announced, 'you have made a much greater Progress in the Discovery of the Passage, than you imagined when there'. Dobbs went on to give his reasons for this surprising assertion. The Wager was not a river but a strait, because it widened and deepened to the west. Middleton had discovered only the most northerly and narrowest entrance, and to the south, between Whalebone Point and Marble Island, would be found a wider, ice-free entrance used by the whales which the expedition had seen in the Wager. Objections about the freshness of water in the Wager, and the non-appearance of a tide from the west, Dobbs answered by pointing to the amount of melting ice in the water, and to the fact that in Magellan's Strait the tide from the west was only encountered halfway through the passage.

Before Middleton was able to reply, Dobbs claimed that he had received from the Chapter Coffee House in London a letter written by 'Messrs Brook and Cobham', who stated that they had sailed with Middleton, and that he had deliberately concealed the existence of a passage.¹ On the receipt of a second letter, which ended with the cryptic comment, 'Direct for us as before. Fox was an honest man', Dobbs hurried to London. There, he said, 'Brook and Cobham' disclosed themselves as Edward Thompson, surgeon of the *Furnace*, and John Wigate the clerk, who convinced him that Middleton had falsified both his journal and chart. It would seem a considerable coincidence that three months after the return of the expedition both Dobbs in Ireland and two members of Middleton's crew in London were simultaneously afflicted with doubts about its explorations, and it could have come as no surprise to Middleton to be informed in April by a former crew member that there was a 'close design' against him by Dobbs, Thompson, Wigate, and Lieutenant Rankin. From this time forward the main concern

¹ Printed in Dobbs, *Remarks*, pp. 142-3.

of both Dobbs and Middleton was to secure witnesses who would be prepared to support them in the controversy that obviously lay ahead.

At the beginning of May the Board of Admiralty questioned Dobbs and several members of the crew about the voyage, and three weeks later sent Middleton a letter informing him that it expected a full answer to the accusations made by Dobbs concerning the conduct of the expedition.¹ Middleton's answer took the form of a one hundred and fifty page manuscript, which he published later that year as his *Vindication*, and was the beginning of a vituperative and prolonged exchange of pamphlets between him and Dobbs.² Explanation of Dobbs' subsequent vindictiveness towards so conscientious an explorer as Middleton had shown himself to be is clearly not to be found in purely personal considerations; and a pointer to his real motives in querying the explorations Middleton had carried out on the west coast of the Bay was revealed in a letter he wrote in January to the captain, when he pleaded that if his own reasoning were upheld and a passage considered probable, then 'the Presumption will be a great Inducement to open the Trade to the Bay'.³ Here was the key to the matter. Henceforth the Northwest Passage was part of a wider scheme to abolish the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company and expand trade in and beyond the Bay. Middleton's blunt refusal to agree that a passage existed meant that his conduct of the expedition had to be discredited. While he was pondering ways and means of putting his new and ambitious plans into operation Dobbs was faced with the problem that official and mercantile opinion would be sceptical after the failure of the recent expedition to find a passage in the place he had confidently predicted. To shift the blame for this lack of success to Middleton would be a shrewd move with a double benefit: it would clear his own reputation of the stigma of failure, and at the same time a renewed belief in

¹ Admiralty Board Minutes, 2 May 1743. Adm 3/47, f. 24v. Admiralty to Middleton, 23 May 1743. Adm 2/479, pp. 320-21.

² Middleton's original manuscript is now in Adm 1/2099.

³ Dobbs to Middleton, 22 Jan. 1743. Middleton, *Vindication*, p. 134.

the existence of a passage would be a justification for a second expedition to Hudson Bay, under a commander less scrupulous of the Company's interests than Middleton.¹

Only when fitted together in this way do the confused pieces from the jigsaw of allegations and counter-allegations fall into place. It is impossible to treat seriously the absurd pseudonymous letters. Although Dobbs claimed to have received them early in 1743 he made no mention of them until the printing of his *Remarks* in 1744, and did not refer to them in his lengthy correspondence with the Admiralty. His assertion that Middleton was acting in concert with Isham because he had been bribed by the Committee before his departure from England can be discounted on the evidence of Isham himself, who summarized his complaints against Middleton with the heartfelt comment, 'I must Needs say he did not show himself to be a Well wisher to Your Hon^{rs} Interest'.² Dobbs made much of the order which he said Middleton had obtained from the Admiralty instructing him not to molest the Company's ships or disturb its trade, but the letter granting this reasonable request came from the Admiralty on 29 May 1741 in answer to the Company's plea of two days earlier; and in the same letter the Admiralty rejected the Company's proposals for limiting the scope of the expedition.

Although the attack on Middleton's handling of the expedition undoubtedly stemmed from Dobbs' desire to keep the subject of the Northwest Passage alive as part of a larger scheme to destroy the Company monopoly in Hudson Bay, it is clear that within a few months of the return of the Middleton expedition Dobbs had convinced himself that there was still reason to believe that a passage existed.³ His close study of Middleton's

¹ The news that Middleton had prohibited private trading while the expedition was at Churchill undoubtedly angered Dobbs, since either he or his agent Samuel Smith had shipped trading goods on board the *Discovery* on which it was hoped to make 2000 per cent profit. For details of this incident see Dobbs, *Remarks*, p. 58; Middleton, *Vindication*, p. 49, and *Reply to Remarks*, p. 71. ² Isham to Committee, [July 1742]. HBC A 11/13, f. 76r.

³ Dobbs retained this belief until the end of his life, and in 1763 (when he was seventy-four years old) he wrote of the cession of Canada to Britain by the Treaty of Paris: 'I have nothing [now] to wish for but the opening the Trade

journal at the beginning of 1743 had shown him that the expedition had not sailed close enough to the west coast of the Bay between the Wager and Marble Island to have made a thorough examination, and he was firmly persuaded that it had missed the entrance to the passage somewhere along that stretch of coast. Such an intuition, however, would hardly gain him sufficient support for another expedition, and one could only take place if the commander of the first were discredited. The accusation that Middleton had been bribed by his former employers not only served to explain why he had not found the passage but, if believed, would lead to a further weakening of the Company's position, already undermined by its initial reluctance to help Middleton in 1741, and by the widespread distrust of chartered companies.

Dobbs produced four important witnesses to testify against Middleton: Thompson, Rankin, Wigate and Moor. They accused the captain of deliberately concealing the existence of a passage by leaving the Wager when the discovery was almost made, of inventing an imaginary Frozen Strait to explain the high tides and whales in the Welcome, and of bringing the explorations to an early close. The four men repeated these charges in published statements, in affidavits, and in evidence given before committees of inquiry: yet there is no indication that they held these opinions before the arrival of Dobbs in London in the spring of 1743. Rankin's journal, which was handed in at the Admiralty in November 1742 (well before the dispute over the expedition's discoveries began), confirms Middleton's account of the voyage, and a letter from him in February 1743 assured the captain that 'I shall for Ever Think My Self bound to pray for your good health, and prosperity, If Ever it should be in my pour [sic] to Serve you by Night or day, I shall allways Think my Self in Duty bound to do it'.¹ Also in November 1742 appeared a letter in *The Gentleman's Magazine* from John Lanrick, to Hudsons Bay and discovery of the passage to the Western American Ocean, which I have labour'd to obtain these thirty Years, and then I should die in peace.' Dobbs to Earl of Egremont, 17 July 1763. C.O. 5/310, f. 27v.

¹ Rankin to Middleton, 12 Feb. 1743. Adm 1/2099.

a volunteer who had sailed on the expedition. He described the Frozen Strait, and concluded 'there was no such Thing as a Passage into the Western Ocean, as was expected'.¹ By 1745 Lanrick had changed his view, as had Rankin, and was ready to give evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons in favour of the existence of a passage; and this same abrupt turn from agreement with Middleton to a stern denunciation of his conduct and opinions was even more marked in William Moor's case. His log, sparse though it is, contains no hint of disagreement with the handling of the expedition. He did not appear at the preliminary examination held by the Board of Admiralty in May 1743, but his views were expressed in a letter he sent Middleton a few days earlier: 'What either Doctor Thompson, or Wygate, can say will go for nothing, as for the Other [Rankin] he is an old Woman, and Mr. Dobbs is a Man of finer Sense than to hear his Cock-and-Bull Story.' The next month he wrote again to Middleton, this time asking for various details about the tides in Hudson Bay. He added, 'I am not a little surprized to hear that the Doctor and Wygate have taken Oath, that it is their Opinion, that there is a Passage thro' the River Wager'.² When Moor next appeared in print, it was this very assertion that he solemnly repeated himself.³

Most of the affirmations of the witnesses who gave evidence against Middleton were incorrect. The most probable explanation for their willingness to swear false statements is that they were bribed; and it is difficult to see who could have been responsible but Dobbs, obsessed with a growing determination to overthrow the Hudson's Bay Company, and resolved to let nothing stand in the way of another expedition to the Bay. Money was not necessarily involved in the corruption of his witnesses. Middleton maintained that they were promised posts of one kind or another, and it is significant that Moor com-

¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XII (Nov. 1742), p. 587.

² Moor to Middleton, 27 April, 13 May 1743. Middleton, *A Rejoinder to Mr. Dobbs's Reply to Captain Middleton* (London, 1745), pp. 149-50.

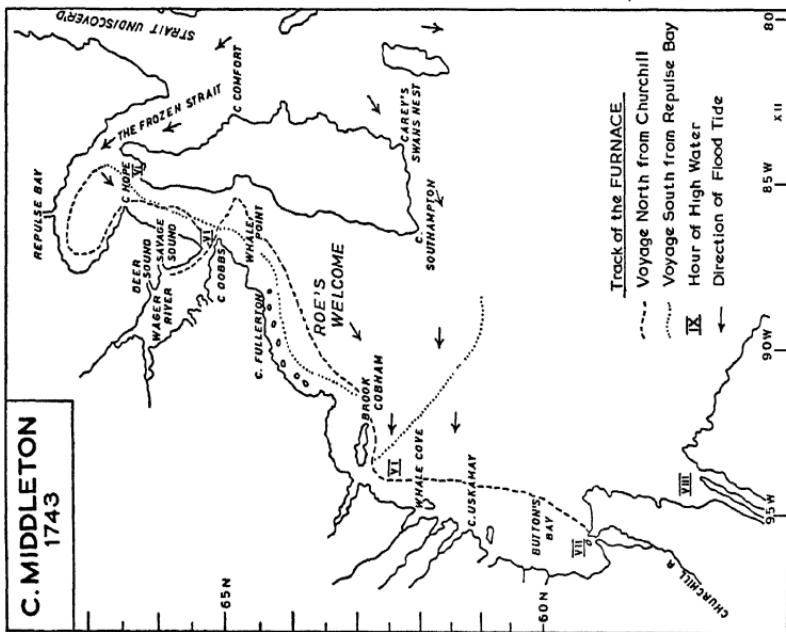
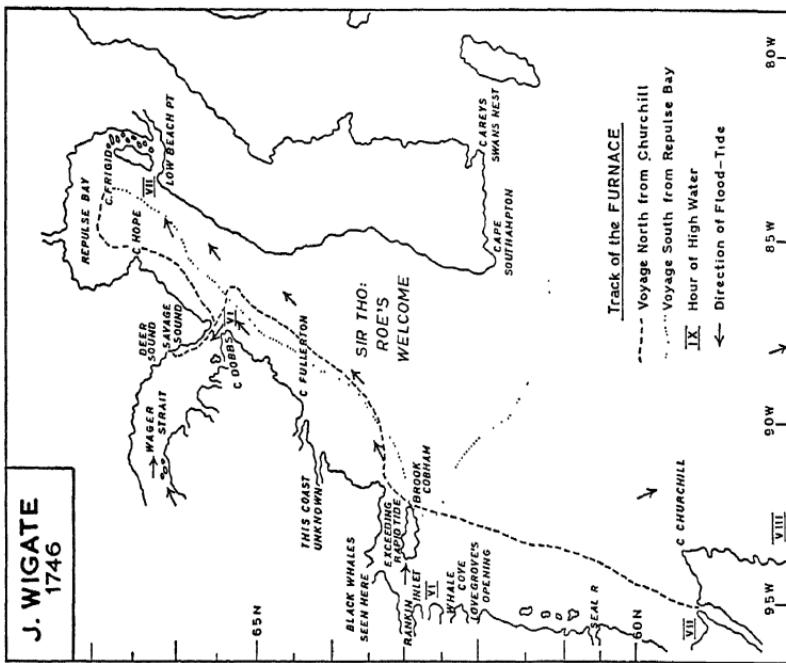
³ Moor to Dobbs [1745]. Dobbs, *A Reply to Capt. Middleton's Answer* (London, 1745), pp. 121-8.

manded Dobbs' privately financed expedition to Hudson Bay in 1746 (despite his earlier public denial of any such intention),¹ and that Thompson sailed with him as surgeon and member of the council. Wigate was originally to have gone when the project was first mooted, but it is not known whether he was on the ships when they finally sailed in 1746.² Rankin alone does not seem to have profited in any obvious way from his part in Middleton's denunciation.

To combat the attack on his reputation Middleton produced no fewer than fifteen witnesses from the discovery crews who confirmed his account of the events of the voyage, and testified to his skill and enthusiasm. That Dobbs was sometimes able to point out minor inconsistencies in their evidence is not surprising; rarely has the commander of an expedition had his decisions and actions so minutely scrutinized. The most important points made about the passage by the two disputants in the several books and pamphlets produced in the course of the controversy were neatly summed up on the rival maps produced by Middleton and Wigate. A comparison of them shows four major differences. Middleton's map marks an unbroken coastline north from Eskimo Point, the Wager as a river, and to the north the tide flowing through Frozen Strait down the west coast of the Bay. Wigate's map shows several openings along a largely unexplored coastline north of Eskimo Point, a strait to the west through the Wager, but none to the north where Middleton placed Frozen Strait, and the tide flowing eastward from the Wager and the other inlets. On all but one of these

¹ In his published letter to Dobbs, Moor had stated, as proof of the disinterested nature of his evidence against Middleton, 'I have no future Views of a Command'. *Ibid.*, p. 128. Some indication of Moor's veracity is provided by a comparison of this statement with one in a letter written by Dobbs to Ward the previous year, that Moor was to be given command of the proposed private expedition to Hudson Bay, as he was 'very sober and carefull and will also be an Adventurer himself'. Dobbs to Ward, 31 March 1744. *Castle Ward Papers*, Bk. VI, p. 100.

² It is possible that Middleton and Wigate had quarrelled shortly after the return of the expedition, for letters in the Admiralty records (*Adm* 2/480, pp. 55, 171) show that as late as July 1743 Wigate had received no pay for the voyage because Middleton refused to grant him the necessary certificate.



Differing Views of the Explorations of 1742

points Middleton was substantially correct. The explorers of 1747 found the Wager to be a closed inlet. Parry in 1821 discovered the Frozen Strait just as Middleton had described it, and later navigators found the tide and whales passing through it into the Welcome. But Middleton's one error was to keep alive hopes of a passage through Hudson Bay for another half-century. Despite his assertions to the contrary, he had not sailed near enough the coast between the Wager and Marble Island to have made a close examination, and so had missed Chesterfield Inlet. His lapse, if such it was (his instructions ordered him to look for a passage north of latitude 65° N.), was understandable, and he expressed his feelings on a landlubber's criticism with some vehemence: 'Could the very knowing Mr. Dobbs imagine that the Ship was to coast a shore, where Land is as high as that over Torbay or above Plymouth, in the manner Boats do, at half a Mile Distance, especially with a Wind, most part of the time, two or more Points on the Shore, and a Tender which was a bad Sailor . . .?'¹ In weather-beaten ships, with dispirited and sick crews, Middleton had made only a perfunctory examination of the tangled coast south of the Wager, and the main desire of all concerned was to finish the work of discovery and return to England.

If Middleton had indeed concealed the existence of a passage, bribery on a considerable scale would have been necessary for him to gain the support of so many witnesses; but far from Middleton using his influence to procure advancement for those witnesses (as Dobbs accused him of doing), he was unable to secure a post himself. He was not offered a command after the Admiralty dropped its inquiries in 1743 about his conduct of the discovery expedition, although the country was at war. For three years, during which time he spent £200 on the pamphlet war with Dobbs, he was forced to live on his capital, until in May 1745, after writing a series of despairing letters to the Admiralty, he was finally given command of the tiny *Shark* sloop. He remained a persistent memorialist, and in the intervals

¹ Middleton, *Reply to Remarks*, p. 38.

between cruising off the Orkneys bombarded the Admiralty with suggestions about future policy, and produced recommendations from the Duke of Cumberland, Admiral Byng, and Trinity House, in the hope that the Admiralty might 'think me worthy of the command of a Ship of Force, by which I may hope to retrieve the fortune I ruin'd, In my former attempt to be of Service to my Country'.¹

Middleton's pleas met with no response, and in 1747 he was involved in further trouble when he was called upon to answer charges of fraud, forgery, and assault. The investigating officer found that the first charges were without foundation, but that Middleton had struck his boatswain. He had questioned other officers about Middleton, and concluded, 'I fear by their accounts he is passionate, which I have given him a Caution of'.² Whether these incidents and Middleton's controversial past influenced the Admiralty, or whether he merely went the way of hundreds of other naval officers in peacetime, the fact remains that in 1748 the captain was placed on the half-pay list, where he remained until his death in 1770.³ Middleton was an ill-used man; and the promise of his early years, his skill as a navigator and pertinacity as an explorer, make the story of his wasted career after 1742 a sad one.

¹ Middleton to Admiralty, 1 Feb. 1747. Adm 1/2105.

² Michell to Admiralty, 13 June 1747. *Ibid.*

³ Adm 25/35, f. 20. See also Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, p. 333, whose note on Middleton's will must be set against some remarks on the captain in *The Monthly Review*, LXX (London, 1784), p. 469n. 'He died, some years ago, near Guisborough, in Yorkshire, in the utmost penury and distress: having, long before, been drove to the necessity of parting with Sir Godfrey Copley's gold medal, which had been presented to him by the Royal Society, in 1742, for his account of Hudson's Bay. His children, four daughters, brought up in ease and elegance by the produce of his labours in the early part of his life, all died, if we remember right, before him: some of them, at least, in a more wretched situation than himself.'

CHAPTER IV

The Voyage of William Moor

AT the same time as he was engaged in pamphlet warfare with Middleton, Dobbs was pushing ahead with his plans for another expedition to Hudson Bay. In March 1744 he petitioned the Privy Council to provide two ships to be used for the discovery of the Northwest Passage 'which is so near being brought to perfection', or, if that was not possible because of the war with France, to grant a reward for the encouragement of persons willing to make the discovery at their own expense.¹ At first Dobbs had high hopes of success. The Privy Council referred his petition to the Admiralty and although the First Lord, the Earl of Winchilsea, told Dobbs that no naval vessels could be spared at that time, he favoured the idea of an expedition and advised Dobbs to apply to Parliament for a £10,000 reward for the discovery of a passage.²

Dobbs intended to do this the following week, and outlined his proposals to Judge Ward. Once the reward was granted, ships would be fitted out, and sixteen 'Adventurers' invited to subscribe £130 to £150 each towards the cost of the expedition, which Dobbs estimated would amount to about £4,000. This would leave £6,000 of the reward to be divided among the subscribers, and as Dobbs enquired of Ward whether he or any of his friends in Ireland wished to join the venture he added: 'I think it cant be called a Lottery except from the dangers of the sea there being almost a certainty of all the Tickets being Prizes.'³ Moor, Thompson, Wigate and some others from the crews who had sailed with Middleton were prepared to join the

¹ *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series*, III, p. 776.

² Dobbs to Ward, 31 March 1744. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. VI, p. 100.

³ *Ibid.*

expedition. Nevertheless, two considerations forced Dobbs to postpone the expedition. He and those merchants who were already pledged to become subscribers found it impossible to buy and fit out ships at such short notice, while Henry Pelham, First Lord of the Treasury, and effective head of the administration, although sympathetic to Dobbs' scheme, advised him not to apply to Parliament so late in the session.¹

Dobbs accordingly postponed the intended application to Parliament, and in an attempt to create a favourable climate of opinion for his designs published that year *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay*. In this work Dobbs skilfully dovetailed several themes: the probability of a Northwest Passage (this section contained the inevitable attack on Middleton); the opening of the trade of the Bay; the settling of colonies inland from the Bay; and in general the substitution of a forceful, anti-French expansionist policy for the sluggish attitude of the Hudson's Bay Company. How much Dobbs knew about the activities of La Vérendrye and the other French explorers of the interior is not certain, but his emphasis of the crucial importance of the struggle between England and France for the great central plain of North America showed that he was more than ever conscious of the danger he had first noted in his memorandum to Walpole fifteen years earlier—that the enterprising French would confine English traders and settlers to the narrow coastal fringes east of the Appalachians and around Hudson Bay. His reading of the works of Jérémie, La Potherie and other French writers, with their information culled from the Indians about the rumoured strait leading from Hudson Bay to the Pacific, and their reports about the River of the West (the waterway which the French overland explorers were seeking), heightened his fears that the French would smell out his own plans for reaching the Pacific, or perhaps anticipate him by discovering a more southerly route to the great ocean. Before the search for a waterway to the Pacific can be seen in perspective it must be remembered that while the English were exploring by way of

¹ Dobbs to Ward, 19 April 1744. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

the 'northern gateway'¹ of Hudson Strait and Bay, farther south the French were pushing steadily westward in search of a river which would lead them either to the 'Mer de l'Ouest' or the Pacific.²

Much of the material in the *Account* about the Northwest Passage had already been printed by Dobbs in his *Remarks upon Capt. Middleton's Defence*, but among the fresh evidence he brought forward which seemed to favour the existence of a passage was the remarkable Fonte letter, the discovery of which by Dobbs in an old issue of an obscure periodical was to intrigue geographers for the rest of the century. The letter appeared to have been written by a Spanish admiral, Bartholomew de Fonte, and described a voyage northward from Lima in 1640, during which Fonte and his lieutenant Barnarda had discovered and explored an extensive network of waterways leading inland from the northwest coast of America. The account stated that at the eastern end of one stretch of water, named the Sea of Ronquillo by Fonte, the Spaniards had encountered a Boston merchantman commanded by a man called Shapley. Dobbs maintained that inquiries had shown that a Shapley had lived in Boston the previous century, and he concluded that the Boston ship had been trading for furs in Hudson Bay, and had passed through

¹ The phrase is Lawrence Burpee's. His edition of the *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye and his Sons* (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1927), and his two-volume work, *The Search for the Western Sea: The Story of the Explorations of North-Western America* (Toronto, 1935), provide, together with Bernard DeVoto's exuberant *Westward the Course of Empire* (London, 1953), the best accounts of French explorations and theories in this period.

² French conceptions of the geography of North America west of the Great Lakes were illustrated by Bellin's map in the first volume of the great work by P. F. X. de Charlevoix, *Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1744). In his accompanying 'Remarques' (*ibid.*, III, pp. i-xix) Bellin stated that he thought the Pacific lay only three hundred leagues distant from Lake Superior, and that a series of lakes and rivers connected the two. Charlevoix himself, who had spent years in Canada questioning French and Indians about the country to the west, believed that between the Sioux Indians and the Pacific lay an inland 'Mer de l'Ouest' which was connected both with the ocean and the Northwest Passage. See Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris, 1879-88), VI, pp. 525-8.

one of the inlets on the west coast of the Bay into the sea where it was sighted by Fonte.¹

There was no way of disproving the Fonte account at this time because the Pacific coast of America north of latitude 43° N. was still unknown. Members of Bering's second expedition had touched the Alaskan coast near Mount St Elias in 1741, but news of their discovery was slow in reaching Western Europe, and even though this pinprick of land was later marked on the charts, vast areas were still left in which the imagination of geographers had full play. The Fonte letter, with its descriptions of fertile and productive countries stretching inland from the Pacific coast of North America, was further proof to Dobbs of the opportunities for trade which awaited British merchants once the passage was discovered, and he brushed aside the rights of the Hudson's Bay Company: 'by the unaccountable Behaviour of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Government and Parliament have a just and legal Right to lay open that Trade to all the Merchants in Britain'.² There were men in England familiar with the Bay region who could point out, as Middleton had done two years earlier, the fallacies and over-optimism of Dobbs' arguments. Captain Coats, a Company mariner for almost twenty-five years, grumbled in the privacy of his personal journal, 'what Mr. Dobbs has thought fitt to call a discription of Hudson's Bay, is so erronius, so superficial, and so trifling, in almost every circumstance. So contrary to the experience and concurrent testimony of every person who have resided in that country . . .'.³ But while the observations of Coats, Isham and other Company servants lay unpublished, and unread outside

¹ Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay, In the North-West Part of America* (London, 1744), pp. 123–8. The Fonte letter first appeared in *The Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious* (London, 1708), pp. 123–6, 183–6. It is printed in Appendix II, *infra*.

² Dobbs, *Account of Hudson's Bay*, p. 158.

³ John Barrow (ed.), *The Geography of Hudson's Bay: Being the Remarks of Captain W. Coats, in many voyages to that locality, between the years 1727 and 1751* (London, The Hakluyt Society, 1852), p. 2. This work by Coats was a collection of navigational hints on the Hudson Bay voyage for the use of his sons, together with a geography of the Bay as far as it was known to him. It remained in manuscript form until its publication by the Hakluyt Society.

Company or family circles, and historians were denied information about the Company's activities,¹ then the field was left open for hostile propagandists and disgruntled employees. With their works for long the only guide to those interested, the Company almost lost its case by default.

Following Pelham's advice, Dobbs delayed further action until the beginning of 1745, when a petition was presented to the House of Commons by several London merchants associated with Dobbs. The petition, which pointed out that the discovery of a navigable passage westward from Hudson Bay would lead to the development of trade with the Pacific coast of America, and with Japan, China and the Philippines, was worded in a way calculated to gain the approbation of all members who had Britain's commercial interests at heart, and went on to request that as such an undertaking would be attended with hazard and expense, a reward should be offered for the discovery.² A Committee of the House, which included all merchants and members for ports, was appointed to consider the petition, and given power to send for 'Persons, Papers and Records'.³ Although the names of worthy and respected merchants graced the petition, it was the indefatigable Dobbs who organized the appearance of witnesses before the Committee. He wrote to the Admiralty asking leave for Rankin to attend the Committee, and also three other members of Middleton's old crew, 'who are Proper Witnesses to be produced . . . by their confirming the Strong Presumptions of a North West Passage'.⁴

With the testimony of these witnesses before it, it is hardly surprising that the Committee's report generally reproduced Dobbs' arguments as faithfully as if he had written it in person.

¹ See John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (2nd edn., London, 1741), I, pp. 566–7, where Oldmixon complained that despite his 'pressing instance' he could obtain no information from the Committee about the Company's history since 1714.

² *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXIV, p. 720.

³ *Ibid.* The Hudson's Bay Company was ordered to produce the journals of Scroggs, Napper and other sloop-masters before the Parliamentary Committee. Committee Minutes, 12 Feb. 1745. HBC A 1/36, p. 257.

⁴ Dobbs to Admiralty, 28 Jan. 1745. Adm 1/2099.

It noted that the witnesses examined had in 1742 been on high ground overlooking the Wager where they 'perceived the Streight to tend away to the Southward of the West, as far as they could see, with many Islands in it', and added, 'It likewise appeared from the Evidence, that the Western Coast, from Esquimaux Point, in Latitude 61°, to Wager River, in Latitude 65°, was broken land'.¹ No mention was made of Repulse Bay and Frozen Strait, of Middleton's tidal observations, nor of any other considerations which might have thrown doubt on the statements made before the Committee. The report, sufficient numbers of which were printed for the use of all members, was referred to a Committee of the whole House.

With this paper probably the sole guide to most members, whose only strong feeling on the subject was likely to be a general desire to encourage trade, the House decided that as the discovery of a Northwest Passage through Hudson Strait would be of 'great Benefit and Advantage to the Trade of this Kingdom', a reward should be offered for its 'perfect Discovery'.² A few weeks later a percipient report to the French foreign ministry stressed that there was more in the merchants' petition than met the eye, and that Dobbs ultimately intended to overthrow the Hudson's Bay Company and form a new company.³ However, the resultant bill, which offered a government reward of £20,000 for the discovery of a passage, and received the royal assent at the beginning of May 1745, contained at the Company's urgent representation a saving clause stating that nothing in the measure was to prejudice any of its rights or privileges.⁴ The Act

¹ *Report Relating to the Finding a North-West Passage* [20 Feb. 1745], p. 5.

² *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXIV, p. 805.

³ Unsigned letter. London, 2 April 1745. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique, Angleterre/419, ff. 297r, 306r.

⁴ *The Statutes at Large*, XVIII, p. 329. A commission was appointed to examine all claims. It consisted of the Lord Chancellor, President of the Privy Council, Lord Privy Seal, Lord Steward, Lord Chamberlain, First Commissioner of the Treasury, First Lord of the Admiralty, the principal Secretaries of State, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Chancellor and under-secretary of the Exchequer, First Commissioner for Trade and Plantations, Treasurer of the Navy, Admirals of the Red, White and Blue Squadrons. The decision of the commission was to be reached by a majority vote.

itself, which remained in force for thirty years, was perhaps Dobbs' greatest personal achievement, for although it committed the government to no immediate expenditure, it seemed to stamp the imprint of authority on what had been the view of a handful of enthusiasts.

Even before the bill became law, plans for a privately financed expedition had been put into operation. On the same day that the Commons decided to introduce the bill, Dobbs told Ward that subscriptions for the voyage were being opened.¹ Money was to be raised by means of £100 shares, with no person to hold more than ten shares. If the passage were discovered, then application would be made to Parliament for the reward, the ships and other effects sold, and the total proceeds shared among the subscribers. A committee of eight, known as the North West Committee, was set up, with Dobbs' London attorney, Samuel Smith, acting as secretary. Various regulations were laid down, the most important being that after the division of the reward 'each of the Subscribers . . . shall signify, whether he is willing to be concerned in prosecuting further Discoveries through the said Passage, and in opening a Commerce with the Natives of the Countries, which may be discovered adjoining, or near, to the said Passage'.² The venture, then, was organized on the traditional lines of a single joint-stock voyage, and was, for all Dobbs' confidence, a speculative undertaking in which only hopes of a large and immediate profit on the return of the expedition, and a footing in the new trade, balanced the risks involved.

It is a tribute to Dobbs' tenacity and ingenuity that within three years of the return of the Middleton expedition, whose explorations had apparently controverted all his theories, another expedition was in preparation, backed by a parliamentary Act offering a substantial reward. Dobbs was a formidable combination of zealot and organizer, visionary and propagandist;

¹ Dobbs to Ward, 12 March 1745. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. VI, p. 95.

² *Articles of Agreement, for carrying on an Expedition by Hudson's Streights, for the Discovery of a North-West Passage* (London, 1745), p. 15.

and the measure of his success in arousing public interest was indicated (and perhaps exaggerated) by a noted writer, John Campbell, who declared that the Act and Dobbs' expedition had 'become the Topic of common Discourse, and of almost universal Expectation'.¹ This quickening of curiosity was not, however, accompanied by any overwhelming eagerness to invest money in the venture. The Articles of Agreement envisaged the expedition sailing by the beginning of May 1745, but apart from the difficulty of finding subscribers at a time when interest in commercial undertakings was being distracted by the fearful prospect of a Jacobite invasion supported by the French, six weeks proved too short a period in which to fit out suitable ships and crews for an Arctic voyage, and the voyage had to be postponed for a further year. The money advanced was put into East India bonds, and the subscription remained open during the winter. Investors were still slow in coming forward, and although in March 1746 Dobbs told Ward that 'we have got subscriptions for about £6000 and once we are found proceeding we dont fear making up the remainder',² only seventy-two out of the one hundred shares were finally taken up, and the members of the North West Committee had to make up the deficiency themselves.

The subscribers fell into two main groups.³ Firstly, there was a small group of men prominent in governing circles, either in England or Ireland, whose interest in the expedition appears to have been aroused by personal contact with Dobbs, or by previous participation in overseas ventures. This group included the Earl of Chesterfield, one of the most influential political figures of the day, who in October 1746 became Secretary of State for the Northern Department. Before this he had been Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, where he had shared Dobbs' interest in Irish trade and manufactures. Chesterfield's godson Solomon

¹ John Harris, *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca: or, a compleat Collection of Voyages and Travels*, revised and enlarged by John Campbell (London, 1744-8), II, p. 399.

² Dobbs to Ward, 4 March 1746. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. VI, p. 105.

³ Their names are listed in Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's-Bay*, pp. xxiii-xxv.

Dayrolles, who had accompanied him to Ireland, was a subscriber, as was another of his relatives, Charles Stanhope, one-time Secretary to the Treasury. The Duke of Montagu was a subscriber who had previously shown interest in colonial enterprises, and was rumoured to have once lost £40,000 in an unsuccessful attempt to establish settlements in the West Indies. The Earl of Granard was an Irish peer and privy councillor, who in 1730 had intended to lead colonists to Lake Erie to check French encroachments from Canada. In 1738 Wager had found him to be one of the few men interested in the question of the Northwest Passage. Lords Newport and Southwell were two other Irish peers, the former, like Dobbs, a Fellow of the Royal Society. Richard Southwell, Secretary of the Council in Ireland, and Richard Gildart, were members of Parliament for the great trading cities of Bristol and Liverpool. Other members of Parliament were Daniel Mussenden, who had served with Southwell and Gildart on the Committee set up to consider the merchants' petition of 1745, and Lord Conway, who had been Dobbs' ward until he came of age. Sir John Rawden (another Fellow of the Royal Society), the Archbishop of Tuam, and George Berkeley, the much-travelled philosopher Bishop of Cloyne, were on the fringes of this group. Other Irish subscribers were Bernard Ward, son of Judge Ward, Dobbs' brother the Reverend Richard Dobbs, and Justin MacCarty, son of the Earl of Clancarty.

The larger and more coherent group was composed of about thirty London merchants. Several of them, William Bowden, Nathaniel Basnett, John Hanbury and Thomas Truman, were engaged in the African and West Indian trade, and some were associated with Dobbs in his other ventures. They formed the controlling body, and the North West Committee consisted of Dobbs and seven of the merchant subscribers. That the planning of the expedition should be left to the merchants was only to be expected. They had experience of overseas ventures, and in the buying of ships, provisions and cargoes. This reliance on the experts in London was natural, and followed precedents

established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the organizing committees of many colonial and trading enterprises had been composed of merchants, even though the list of subscribers had often been headed by an imposing array of notables.¹ There can be but little doubt that, if the expedition had proved successful, many of the merchant investors would have taken up the option offered in the Articles of Agreement, and formed the nucleus of a new trading company to exploit the discovery.

It was this aspect of the proposed expedition which caused the Hudson's Bay Company to take an even more anxious interest in Dobbs' activities than it had on the occasion of the Middleton voyage. Once again an extraordinary meeting of the General Court was convened, which decided, as in 1741, to leave the protection of the Company's trade and privileges to the discretion of the Governor and Committee.² And in 1746 letters were sent to the Bay posts giving a detailed description of the two discovery vessels bought by the North West Committee, the *Dobbs Galley* and the *California*, commanded by Moor and Francis Smith (who until 1744 was master of the *Churchill* sloop, in which he had made several trading voyages along the west coast of the Bay).³ The policy to be followed by the factors towards the expedition was also set out in detail. They were not to allow any vessel to approach the forts unless it made the correct signal, and were to oppose 'Discoverers or pretended Discoverers' by all possible means. They were to prohibit them from wintering at any Company post unless they were in distress, and prepared to give security not to trade with the Indians nor entice any servants from the Company's employ. The attention of factors was drawn to the Act of 1745, copies of which had already been sent to them, and in particular to the clause protecting the interests of the Company. There were even refer-

¹ See e.g. A. P. Newton, 'The Beginnings of English Colonisation', *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, I (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 81-2.

² General Court, 26 March 1745. HBC A 1/36, p. 284.

³ Only one rough draft of these letters has survived; it is to be found at the beginning of the Moose Fort Letter Book (HBC B 135 C/1).

ences to the action to be taken should the expedition attack any of the forts and overpower the garrison.

The letter not only reveals the Company's fear that the discovery vessels and their crews were interlopers masquerading as explorers, but also demonstrates how its hands were tied in dealing with any expedition which claimed that it was searching for the Northwest Passage. After its clash with the Admiralty and Regency Council in 1741 the Company could hardly give instructions for the expedition to be treated as an avowed rival, especially as the 1745 Act stated that 'all Persons whatsoever, being subjects of his Majesty, and residing in any place where the said adventurers may come, in the prosecution of the said discovery shall give the said adventurers all aid and assistance requisite'.¹ For the Company the situation was even more exasperating than at the time of the Middleton voyage, since Dobbs' writings had shown that behind the enthusiasm for discovery were wider and, from the Company's point of view, more sinister motives.

An examination of the instructions given to the two captains confirms that, although geographical discovery was the primary objective of the Moor expedition, the intended exploitation of those discoveries that were made would have had considerable repercussions on the Company's interests.² Moor and Smith were to encourage trade with the Eskimos on the west coast of the Bay by giving them 'more for their Furrs etc. than is usually given by the Company, in such Goods as they chuse, so as to fix a Friendship with them for the future'; treaties of alliance were to be made with native inhabitants, and if possible some were to be brought back to England to be trained as interpreters. However, strict orders were given that on no account was the work of discovery to be delayed by trading activities. On this voyage the over-riding objective was the discovery of the passage and the claiming of the £20,000 reward; profits from sporadic trade would be trifling by comparison. If the expedition did not

¹ *The Statutes at Large*, XVIII, p. 329.

² The instructions are printed in Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's-Bay*, pp. 106-19.

find a passage after an exhaustive examination in the 1746 season it was to return to England without wintering, and thus avoid unnecessary expense. This injunction reinforces the impression that the Company had little to fear in the way of its trade being damaged by this particular expedition; but it is clear that the discovery of a passage by the explorers would have led to a development of trade which would have seriously impaired the Company's position in the Bay. The order to trade for furs at a more favourable standard than that set by the Company was an indication of the policy that might be followed later.

The navigational directions given to the captains inevitably reflected the views held by Dobbs, and expounded by him in various books and pamphlets. When the expedition reached the west coast of Hudson Bay the ships were, according to the state and direction of ice and wind, either to look for a passage along the coast near Pistol Bay, or make for the Wager. If it was decided to explore the Wager, the vessels were to sail up that inlet as far as the point reached by Rankin in 1742, and proceed slowly from there, testing the tides and the salinity and depth of the water until a flood-tide from the west was encountered. The vessels were then to sail boldly on to the west or southwest, and winter in some temperate spot on the Pacific coast of the continent. The same procedure was to be followed if it was decided to search the openings south of the Wager: the ships were to be guided by the western tide into the passage, and so on to the Pacific.

Nor were Dobbs and his fellow subscribers alone in their optimism. More than one observer in England considered that the discovery expedition had a reasonable chance of success, and three works written at this time typify the habitual confidence shown by even normally shrewd judges when the subject of the Northwest Passage was under discussion. The men in question were by no means negligible authorities: Captain Coats, the Company seaman whose unfavourable comments on Dobbs' *Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay* have previously been noted, and who can be absolved from any suspicion

of partiality towards him; John Campbell, the learned and influential reviser of Harris' *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*; and the compiler of *A Complete System of Geography* published in 1747 under Emanuel Bowen's name, although in fact he was only responsible for the maps, and this revision of Moll's earlier work was undertaken by Stephen Whatley.

Coats had been on the west coast of Hudson Bay in 1737 in connection with the abortive Napper expedition, and had twenty years' experience of the Bay region. His observations, then, are not to be taken lightly, particularly since they were private reflections, not intended for publication at the time. Coats did not accept Middleton's contention that a northeast tide flowed through the Frozen Strait to cause the high tides around Whale Cove, and he vigorously condemned his former associate over this matter: 'so notorious a trip in him will justifie all Dobbs has imputed to him; and this will stand as a monument of folly to posterity, how all attempts to hide the truth are weak and vain'.¹ Nor did Coats believe that the Wager was merely a river as Middleton insisted, and he agreed with Dobbs that the high tides along the west coast of the Bay came from the region near Whale Cove and Marble Island. He clearly believed that there was a passage, and that his employers were not unduly exerting themselves to find it. 'I am of opinion with others', he wrote, 'that if the company had thought it their interest (and if there were not political reasons to the contrary), that discovery had been determined long before this time'.²

Whatley's work, too, was not a polemic pamphlet, but a description of the regions of the world, compiled from all available evidence. The controversy between Dobbs and Middleton was once again examined, and like Coats the editor rejected Middleton's account of the Frozen Strait, and concluded that the extraordinary tides along the west coast of the Bay could come only

¹ Barrow, *Geography of Hudson's Bay*, p. 26.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34. Edward Thompson later maintained that Coats had once offered the Company his services to discover the Northwest Passage, and had been rebuffed. Thompson's affidavit before the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, 16 Feb. 1748. Noted in HBC E 18/1, f. 142v.

from the Pacific. Bowen's maps illustrated this view, showing the Wager open to the west, broken land farther south, and no indication of the Frozen Strait. Whatley's concluding remarks about Moor's ships, which had left England the previous year, show again the optimism with which the expedition was regarded in some quarters: 'there has been no News of them, that we know of; but it is suppos'd they are gone thro' the Passage, and an Account of them is expected by the first homeward-bound East-India Ships'.¹

Campbell's massive tomes were very different, both in scope and intent, from the brief jottings of Coats and the compilation put together by Whatley. The avowed purpose of the author of the revised edition of Harris' classic work was to encourage British trade in all parts of the world 'as the surest Means of making us a great, wealthy, powerful and happy people'; and his collection of voyages was interspersed with comments and exhortations designed to open new branches of commerce and revive old ones. Campbell followed other writers of his day in lamenting the burden of debt and taxes lying on the country, the loss of markets for British manufactures, and above all 'that supine Indolence, which for many Years has locked up our Faculties, with Respect to Discoveries, while other Nations that we seem to despise have crept so fast into Naval Power, as already to tread upon our Heels'.² The most important single step that could be taken to arrest this decline would be to find the Northwest Passage, for its discovery and exploitation would bring a new vitality to that mercantile section of the nation upon which Britain's wealth and sea-power ultimately depended. In Dobbs he found a kindred spirit, and although he did not accept all the accusations against Middleton and the Hudson's Bay Company, he emphatically supported the campaign to discover a passage, and expand British trade and settlements in North America.

¹ *A Complete System of Geography* (London, 1747), II, p. 799.

² Harris (revised Campbell), *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, II, p. 1011. For other gloomy comments on British trade see Matthew Decker, *An Essay on the Causes of the Decline of the Foreign Trade* (London, 1744).

The benefits which Campbell considered would result from the discovery of a passage were similar to those stressed by Dobbs, and were thoroughly integrated with general commercial and strategic interests. The memory of the misfortunes and rewards of the Anson expedition was still fresh, and Campbell emphasized the strategic advantages the possession of a passage would give Britain in her rivalry with Spain. Nothing was more galling to this fiery patriot than the contemplation of the rich Spanish domains lying secure from surprise attack on the far side of America; but if a passage were found through Hudson Bay, he pointed out, then British squadrons could sail swiftly and unperceived to Spain's Pacific possessions. Like Dobbs, Campbell also directed attention to the vast areas which would be opened to British merchants if a navigable passage were discovered: the unknown lands of Northwest America, the rich islands believed to lie between Japan and the American coast, and those eastern parts of the Indies difficult of access from Britain.

Campbell's conviction that a passage existed was based partly on the same technical arguments that Dobbs had advanced, but it sprang also from his staunch belief in the old philosophical and geographical concept of 'a balance'. Thus, as there was a strait in the southern hemisphere (Magellan's), so there should be one in the northern; and as the coast of Asia had been shown by Bering's discoveries to extend much farther to the northeast than had been thought, then to balance this disproportionate mass of land, the continent of America could not extend as far to the west as some maintained. To preserve the equilibrium of land and sea, there must be a great expanse of water between Asia and North America, just as there was between America and Europe; and any passage through Hudson Bay to the Pacific would therefore be a relatively short one.¹ Such wishful thinking matched that of Dobbs, and the suppositions of both men were influenced by the fact that they were interested in the passage

¹ The relevant passages by Campbell on the Northwest Passage will be found in *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, II, pp. 399-404, 1039-41.

solely as a short navigable route which would enable Britain to dominate the North American continent and the seas beyond. The desire for discovery for its own sake played little part in their theories, and the dogged nineteenth-century determination to find a passage, regardless of its length or practicability as a shipping route, had no counterpart in this period.

The expedition on which the hopes of Dobbs and his associates rested had left the Thames on 20 May 1746 after the *Dobbs Galley* and the *California* had been repaired and strengthened at Deptford.¹ Dobbs had followed the custom of the committee members of the Hudson's Bay Company, and had gone to Gravesend to take leave of the expedition, which joined there a convoy including the Company ships. Despite the high wages offered the crews, and the rewards promised if the passage were found (for the captains as much as £500), the discovery ships were still not fully manned, and at Sunderland Smith sent his mate on shore to look for a carpenter and three or four seamen. At the Orkneys command of the convoy was taken over by none other than Middleton, at this time commander of the *Shark* sloop, but within a week the ships had dispersed, and the discovery vessels did not see the Company ships again.

On 21 June the expedition nearly came to a premature end when fire broke out near the powder room of the *Dobbs Galley*, and the confusion and panic on board before the flames could be extinguished revealed a lack of discipline that boded ill for the

¹ Accounts of the voyage are to be found in the rival narratives published soon after the return of the expedition by the clerk of the *California*, T. S. Drage, and Dobbs' agent on board the *Dobbs Galley*, Henry Ellis. Both accounts have to be used with caution, but their value as source material differs considerably. Drage's detailed account of the voyage, though marred by his personal animosity towards Moor and Ellis, is that of an individual with no pressing interest in the struggle between the Hudson's Bay Company and its opponents, whereas Ellis' work approximates more closely to an 'official' version written at the behest of the North West Committee for propaganda purposes. Francis Smith's manuscript journal is also extant. It is a seaman's log, terse, and often uninformative on vital points. Nevertheless, its brief statements on the explorations can be accepted as reliable, and serve as a useful standard against which to check the accounts of Drage and Ellis.

success of the venture. Five days after this episode the first ice was sighted, and then great icebergs, 'one equal in Size and much resembling a large Gothick Church', wrote the wondering Drage. By 8 July the ships were off the entrance of Hudson Strait, having taken less than a month to reach there from the Orkneys, but progress then became slow and tedious. In 1741 Middleton had passed through the Strait in six days, but Moor's ships spent nearly a month struggling through the ice, and did not clear the Strait until the beginning of August. 'The Strait is the stumbling-block; the Bay is the broad highway', a modern explorer has written;¹ and obstruction from ice and fog in this four hundred-and-fifty-mile-long bottleneck delayed, in all but the most favourable seasons, ships trying to pass through to the open summer waters of the Bay.

On 11 August (by which time in 1741 Middleton had already been three days at Churchill), the ships sighted the west coast of the Welcome in latitude 64° N. before being driven southward by gales. Land was not seen again until Marble Island was reached on 13 August, and there the council met and decided to send two boats on shore to test the tide and search for an opening along the coast of the mainland opposite. The boats' crews spent two days on the island, and found that the tide rose ten feet and appeared to come from the northeast. But Drage noted that one night the ships were carried to the eastward by a flood-tide, and he presumed it came from the Pacific, although a despairing paragraph in which he tried to reconcile the contradictory observations of tides and half-tides taken from the ships reveals the unreliability of tidal measurements made in this casual manner.² Indeed, the direction and height of the tides neatly plotted on Wigate's map had little relevance when applied to the swirling waters off the broken western coastline of Hudson Bay. Dobbs rested his case for a passage on tidal observations, but ignored the complicating factors pointed out

¹ George Binney, 'Hudson Bay in 1928', *The Geographical Journal*, LXXIV (July 1929), p. 7.

² Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, I, pp. 91-2.

by the experienced Middleton, who stressed that the rules governing the movement of tides applied only in ideal conditions, and who quoted Halley's warning to good effect:

All these things would regularly come to pass, if the whole Earth were covered with Sea very deep: but by reason of the Shoalness of some Places, and the Narrowness of the Straits thro' which the Tides are in many Cases propagated, there arises a great Diversity in the Effect, not to be accounted for without an exact Knowledge of the Circumstance of the Places.¹

As a result of Dobbs' preoccupation with the direction and height of the tide, much time was spent by the Moor expedition laboriously investigating intricate coastal rips and currents which would have been better employed exploring the actual coastline. By now tidal measurements were a distraction rather than a guide to explorers seeking a passage through Hudson Bay

On the return of the boats from Marble Island another council was held, at which it was suggested that the ships should examine the inlet west of the island, discovered by Rankin in 1742 and named after him. These frequent meetings of the captains, mates, surgeons and agent to discuss policy invariably led to dissension and delay. Instead of one leader there were nine; but Moor, no doubt mindful of the fate of Middleton, and unwilling to accept sole responsibility for the expedition's course, insisted on following his instructions to summon a council 'in all Difficulties where Doubts may arise upon the most prudent Method of proceeding to make out the Discovery'. This particular meeting of the council lasted two days before any agreement was reached and then, after Smith had refused to take his ship among the uncharted shoals and rocks where (it was thought) Knight's ships had been wrecked, the council decided to winter in the Bay and renew the search the next summer. There was little alternative. The delay in passing through Hudson Strait meant that it was impossible to carry out more than a limited amount of exploration in the 1746 season, even though the ships had stayed out later than those of any previous expedition. After

¹ Middleton, *Vindication*, p. 32.

some discussion Port Nelson near York Fort was chosen as a wintering place in preference to Churchill because the ice there broke up earlier in the spring, the climate was milder, and game and wood more plentiful.

Once more, an expedition sent to the Bay against the inclination of the Company intended to shelter near one of its posts, but off York Fort the ships were hindered in their manœuvres among the shoals of the open roadstead by the precautions taken by Isham, newly appointed factor at the post, whose instructions specifically warned him against enemy French or Spanish ships masquerading as discovery vessels.¹ Although Isham had been on board the discovery ships before they left England, and must have recognized them as they drew nearer—the *Dobbs Galley* ‘Square Stern’d a Griffin at the Head . . . painted yellow and black’, and the *California* ‘Square stern’d A Womans Head before’—he sent out a boat which cut down a guiding beacon and took up the buoys indicating the channel. The possibility that Moor’s ships had been captured had to be considered, and, as Isham later explained, ‘he had done nothing but what he could answer to his Masters’.² The factor could afford to make no errors, and if the discovery captains had thought of the simple and courteous expedient of sending a boat ashore as soon as the fort was sighted, much unpleasantness might have been avoided.

This initial difference was followed by a period of indecision during which Isham did his utmost to dissuade Moor and Smith from wintering near the fort. Although concern for the safety of the ships accounted in part for Isham’s attitude,³ his correspondence with the other factors shows that he was understandably anxious about the effect the presence of the expedition might have on trade the following summer; and the general reaction in the Bay to the news of the arrival of the discovery ships at York

¹ HBC B 135 C/1, f. 9 (rough draft). ² *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, p. 43.

³ Isham warned the captains of the danger of a spring deluge when the ice broke up, and in 1748 such a deluge swept through the creek where the discovery ships had lain the previous winter, and smashed the banks. See Rich and Johnson, *Isham’s Observations*, p. 211n.

was suspicion of Moor's motives in wintering at so important a centre of Company trade, rather than at Churchill, the nearest harbour to the scene of exploration.¹ For three weeks the captains beat about, looking for a suitable spot to moor their ships. From the fort Isham watched their activities disapprovingly, but faced with the clause in the privateer's commission carried by the ships, which gave them the right to assistance in any friendly port, he concluded that he could not prevent them from wintering where they wished, especially as they appeared to fulfil the conditions laid down in the Company's instructions, and had assured him 'tis our intent to carry on no illicit traffick'.²

Finally, after much argument with Isham and with each other, Moor and Smith decided to dock the ships, not on the Nelson, but in a creek about five miles above the fort on the south bank of Hayes River. Smith's journal is normally silent on the subject of his quarrels with Moor, but the entry he made in it when taking the *California* up to the creek indicates the strained relationship existing between the two captains: 'After I had got all ready for going up with the Ship to ten shilling Creek as I was getting in my shore fasts Capt Moor came on Board and said he would go up the same tyde at last we agreed to toss up which ship should go up the other to assist with all they could as to Boats and Men Capt Moor wone . . .'.³ This childish wrangle was the prelude to a winter of bickering during which the exasperated Isham often found himself in the absurd position of mediator between the two factions ranged behind the captains, who for long periods were not on speaking terms. On occasion the peacemaker found himself reviled by both parties, and the situation was not improved by Isham's tendency

¹ See e.g. Pilgrim to Isham, 9 Oct. 1746. HBC B 239/b/4, f. 3v.

² Council of Dobbs *Galley* and *California* to Isham, 4 Sept. 1746. Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, Appendix A, p. 249. This appendix contains Isham's journal and copies of letters between him and the discovery expedition. An account of the expedition's stay at York is given in the introduction by Professor Rich; there is also a good short account in Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp. 213-17.

³ Smith Journal, 19 Sept. 1746. HBC E 18/2, f. 30r. This is a contemporary copy of Smith's original journal, which is among the Dobbs Papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D.O.D. 162/44.

to moralize on the disunity of the opposite camp, 'which I imagined to be one family'.¹

By 23 September the ships were moored; in safety according to Drage, although Isham, ever mindful of the risk of a spring deluge, thought it 'a sad Situation of a place'.² The crews then turned their full attention to the building of winter quarters, and the preparations made show more signs of forethought than the inadequate measures taken by Middleton at Churchill five years earlier. Ellis designed a log-house for the officers and some of the crews. The 'intended Mansion', as Ellis proudly termed his creation, was situated half a mile from the ships and was heated by a single large stove, with cabins in the upper storey for the officers and Mrs Smith (Isham's doubts about the seriousness of the explorers' ostensible quest were probably sharpened by the presence on the *California* of Francis Smith's wife, the first white woman to winter in Hudson Bay within living memory), and room on the ground floor for some of each ship's company. Only a few from the crews actually lived there, and most adopted the method of wintering followed by the Company men, and lived in log-tents in the woods. Without this example the crews might well have suffered many more casualties than they did, because techniques of wintering in Arctic conditions were as yet virtually unknown to British explorers. The seven men who shared each tent spent the day hunting and cutting wood. Soon after sunset the tent was closed up, a good fire made, and the main meal of the day eaten, followed by half a pint of brandy and a pipe. Once a week provisions were fetched from the log-house on light sleds, but only enough to provide meals for five days. This was a deliberate policy, wrote Drage, 'to make the people exercise themselves in Hunting, to provide themselves for those two Days; and that it would also be two Days in a Week for fresh Provisions'.³

As the old hands on Moor's council had been well aware, the

¹ Isham to Moor and Smith, 10 Dec. 1746. Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, Appendix A, p. 267.

² York Journal, 24 Sept. 1746. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³ Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, I, pp. 171-2.

climate at York was milder than that at the more northerly and exposed post at Churchill, and the discovery crews did not don winter dress until the beginning of November. Only two minor cases of frost-bite were reported during the winter, and from this point of view the decision to winter at York was a sensible one. Until December partridges were plentiful, but then fresh meat became difficult to obtain. Although Ellis criticized Isham for his refusal to allow the Indians to supply the discovery crews with meat, Drage pointed out that the Company servants themselves had so little that the factor asked Moor and Smith for some salt beef, promising to repay them with venison in season. Letters between the factor and captains show that Isham was punctilious in fulfilling his promise to send two Indians to shoot partridges for the ships' crews, and even agreed to divide the week's bag between the two argumentative captains; but at times the total did not allow the men more than one bird each a week. It was probably a combination of this lack of fresh meat, and the excessive consumption of brandy, that led to the outbreak of scurvy in December. Altogether, seven men died of scurvy during the winter, and the epitaph Ellis penned for one was possibly applicable to all, 'He had been a great Dram-Drinker, and therefore the Scurvy would not spare him'.¹

The lingering effects of scurvy had a disabling result on the entire expedition, and the winter at York illustrated once more that problem which had faced Middleton: how to pass the winter months near the scene of exploration without the disease having a disastrous effect on the health and morale of the crews. While obstruction from ice in Hudson Strait prevented expeditions from England carrying out explorations in Hudson Bay and returning home the same season, the bleak climate of the Bay led to scurvy or frost-bite so debilitating crews wintering there

¹ Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's-Bay*, p. 206. Isham had no doubt about the cause of the disease among the discovery crews: 'I was truely informed by mr. frost, who was near them all the time, being Little Else perform'd but Drinking night and Day . . . its no wonder their men was Afflicted with the Scurvy when they had Such plenty of common Spir'ts.' Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, pp. 215-6.

that effective exploration the following summer was made difficult, if not impossible. Lack of knowledge in Britain about the causes and prevention of scurvy contributed to this dilemma of Hudson Bay explorers.¹

Fortunately for the discovery crews the winter was shorter than at Churchill, and in March the snow began to melt, most of the men affected by scurvy were recovering, and Smith's crew took only three days to cut the *California* free from ice. Meanwhile, work was proceeding on the task of converting the long-boat of the *Dobbs Galley* into a small schooner by lengthening, raising and decking it. The schooner, named the *Resolution*, was intended for use along those stretches of the coast where the ships dare not sail too near the shore, and consequently could not make a close examination. Slowly, successive expeditions were learning from previous failures, for one of the reasons why Middleton had not been able to make an accurate survey of parts of the west coast of the Bay in 1742 was lack of such a light vessel.

At the end of April the ice in the creek where the ships were lying broke up without the feared deluge, and at the beginning of June they were warped out of the creek and moored in the river. For Isham this was a time of anxiety and tension. The Indians with their fur-laden canoes had to pass the ships on their way to the fort, and the factor was well aware that the Committee in London suspected that the two captains were but 'pretended Discoverers', and that the driving force behind the expedition was not the search for a passage, but a determination to steal the Company's trade. Drage's narrative shows that although an attempt was made by some sailors to trade with the Indians as their canoes passed close by the ships, the Indians refused to open their bales until they reached the fort.² He added

¹ It was at this time that the Edinburgh physician James Lind was conducting his investigations into scurvy, but he did not publish his masterly work, *A Treatise of the Scurvy*, until 1753. Even then, it was many years before the value of his work was universally recognized, and the Admiralty did not put his main recommendations into effect until the end of the century.

² Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, pp. 36, 40.

that after the expedition returned to England it was a 'heavy Accusation' against the captains by some subscribers that they had not traded with the Indians; and there is no evidence that Moor and Smith made any effort to tempt the Indians into illicit private trade.¹ If the expedition had found the passage and gained the £20,000 reward, there doubtless would have been no mention of the opportunity for trade that presented itself at York. It was evidently the failure of the expedition in its main task that provoked some of the merchants, strongly opposed as they were to the Company monopoly, to inquire why the captains had not taken advantage of their favourable position above York Fort to trade with the Indians, and make a profit which would have compensated to some small extent for the financial losses incurred by the expedition.

The discovery ships sailed from York on 24 June—'to my Great Satisfaction' wrote Isham to the other factors—and four days later reached Cape Eskimo. Moor decided to explore the coast between this point and Marble Island in the *Resolution*, and spent much of the next fortnight looking for an opening near Whale Cove. This fruitless search was probably influenced by the Wigate map of 1746, which marked 'Lovegrove's Opening' in this region, but when the ships met again Moor reported 'no Appearance of a Passage'.² While Moor was away Smith on the *California* had followed the council decision taken the previous August, and sent the longboat under his second mate Westall to test the tides near Rankin's Inlet. After three days Westall returned with the discouraging news that the tide nowhere flowed from the west, although he had seen clear water beyond the inlet. Smith promptly sent his first mate to investigate, but he found that Rankin's Inlet was a closed bay,

¹ The next year, in response to a query from the Committee, Isham's successor at York wrote, 'We are not Sensible, nor can Learn of any Depradations done by the late Discoverers'. Newton to Committee, 27 Aug. 1748. HBC A 11/114, f. 129r.

² Smith Journal, 13 July 1747. HBC E 18/2, f. 51r. Lovegrove was a Company seaman who had sailed with Smith in 1744 in the *Churchill* sloop along the west coast of the Bay.

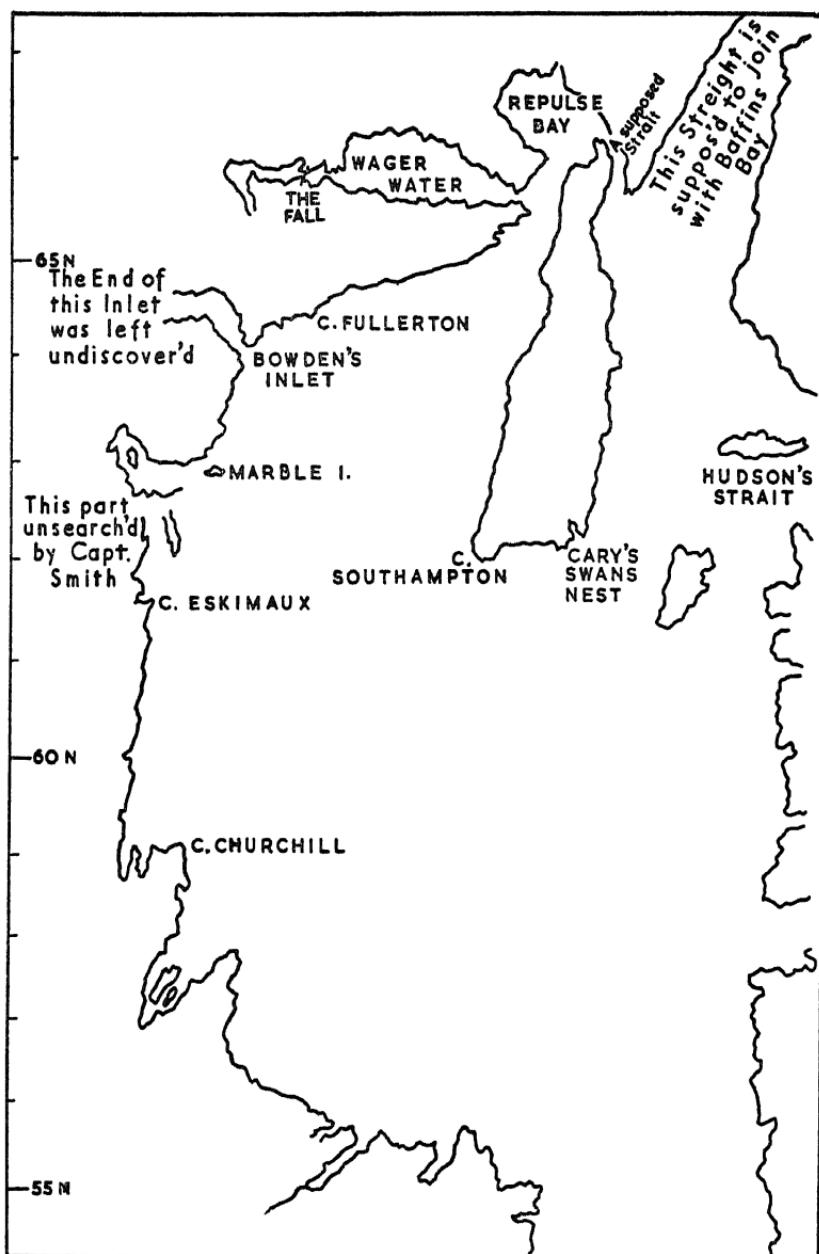
and that the stretches of water glimpsed by Westall were only small lakes, 'which we were then sensible, to our no small mortification, was our Western Sea', wrote Drage.¹

Drage accompanied both expeditions, and his narrative makes it clear that the theories of Dobbs and others had fostered among some of the officers and men a genuine expectation that at any moment the waters of the Pacific might be sighted beyond the low hills fringing this stretch of coast. With the trend of the northwest coast of America unknown, it was difficult to prove otherwise, but one result of this unreasoning optimism could be seen in the crushing effect failure had on crews conditioned by such propaganda. Volunteers though they were, they were not prepared to face the months of painstaking investigation normally called for in Arctic exploration. After a few weeks of fruitless searching disillusionment set in, and the main concern of most on board was to return home before the winter ice closed the Bay and Strait. Moor's expedition was sent to Hudson Bay to prove a set theory, and when the axioms on which the theory was based were found to be false, officers and men alike became quickly demoralized.

The two ships continued to sail northwards while the *Resolution* and the longboat of the *California* explored the shore marked hopefully on Wigate's map as 'Coast unknown'. Independently of each other they found and entered an inlet three or four leagues wide in latitude 63° 44' N.² For four days Westall in the longboat sailed up the inlet, which bore every sign of being the passage. Its width increased to seven or eight leagues, the shores became steeper, and the water remained salt. Then Westall found the water becoming shallower and fresher, and decided to return. On the way down the inlet he met the schooner, and the two boats sailed back together to the ships

¹ Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, p. 218. Rankin's Inlet was renamed Douglas's Inlet by Smith.

² Smith named the inlet Bowden's, but it became generally known by Ellis' name of Chesterfield Inlet. Although the deepest inlet on the west coast of the Bay, it had not been noticed by any previous explorer. Smith, sailing past its entrance in the *California*, merely noted it as a deep bay.



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anxiously searching for them off Cape Fullerton. After hearing the reports of their boat crews about the newly discovered inlet Moor and Smith decided to go on and explore the Wager. This decision was clearly influenced both by Dobbs' insistence that the Wager was a strait, and by the shortness of the navigable season. If another fortnight was spent exploring Chesterfield Inlet, and it was not the entrance to the passage, by then it might well be too late to sail northward to explore the Wager.

Because of fog and a miscalculation by Moor, the ships did not enter the Wager until the end of July. Smith evidently kept an open mind on the question of whether it was a strait or not, cautiously referring to it in his journal as 'Wager Straights or River', and noting with disapproval that the openings shown on Wigate's map along the southwest shores of the inlet were nowhere to be seen.¹ The ships sailed as far as a bay twenty miles above Middleton's old anchorage, and there a council decided that the boats should take provisions for a month and explore the Wager westward in the direction of the Pacific. If the boats had not returned by 25 August the ships were to sail for England. Moor and Smith commanded their boats in person on this crucial expedition, and were accompanied by Ellis and Drage. The boats worked their way up the gloomy, rocky inlet until they came to a fall one hundred and fifty miles from the entrance. The boats negotiated this obstacle, but on 4 August, reported Ellis:

The Day no sooner broke, than we went ashore, and from the Hills that were but a very small Distance from the Coast, we had the Mortification to see clearly that our hitherto imagined Strait ended in two small unnavigable rivers Thus all our Hopes vanished, and we had nothing to console us for the Pains we had taken, the Time we had spent, and the Dangers we had run, but the Satisfaction of having done in this Respect, all that could be looked for from us.²

As soon as the boats arrived back at the ships on 7 August the

¹ Smith Journal, 30 July 1747. HBC E 18/2, f. 55r.

² Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's-Bay*, p. 258.

inevitable council meeting was held. The atmosphere at the meeting was one of depression and confusion, and a plan put forward by Ellis to examine Repulse Bay was rejected. Instead, after a week had been wasted searching the northern shores of the Wager for an opening, the council decided to test the tides in the Welcome and off Carys Swan Nest in an effort to determine their source. This had been done so many times before that the decision appears a peculiarly pointless one, and it is difficult to understand why no mention was made of carrying out a further investigation of Chesterfield Inlet. Not even Ellis suggested this course, although according to his published narrative he considered the inlet to be perhaps the most likely entrance to the passage. It was not yet the middle of August, and as the council had envisaged the ships being in the Wager as late as 25 August, there was time enough for exploration of the more southerly inlet.

An examination of the circumstances in which Chesterfield Inlet was later given prominence as the probable entrance to the Northwest Passage suggests an explanation of the apparent lack of interest about the termination of the inlet during the voyage. The first account of the voyage to be published was contained in a letter to the editor of *The British Magazine* printed in November 1747, only a few weeks after the return of the expedition. The writer of the letter (probably Ellis) admitted that the Wager led only to a large lake, but went on, 'a passage must be attempted another way, and will yet probably succeed . . . I make no doubt but another attempt will give you the sequel and completion of'.¹ Despite the writer's confidence he did not mention the existence of Chesterfield Inlet as justification for his opinion. Not until the publication of Ellis' account of the voyage in August 1748 was there any suggestion that the inlet might be the passage, and this book was essentially a work of propaganda published in connection with the attack then being launched on the Hudson's Bay Company. Drage's account of the explorations of the 1747 season was not published until

¹ *The British Magazine*, II (Nov. 1747), p. 498.

February 1749, and although he was indeterminate on the general question of the passage he refuted Ellis' optimistic statements about Chesterfield Inlet.¹ It seems probable then, that through the exigencies of the situation in England after the return of the expedition, when every effort was made by Dobbs and his associates to show that the expedition had not been a complete failure, Chesterfield Inlet was given a significance it never possessed on the actual voyage. Partly as a result of this publicity the inlet remained for the next half-century the main hope of those who still believed there to be a passage through Hudson Bay.

The resolve to carry out little further exploration, and merely to test tides in the open waters of the Bay, was a popular one on board the discovery ships; but the council's nerveless decision emphasized a failing evident from the beginning of the expedition—the lamentable lack of a strong captain. The councils, reaching their decisions by majority vote, were a far from satisfactory way of determining policy. Moor and Smith were invariably opposed to each other, and with the captains at loggerheads the fainthearts on the council usually won the day. Indecision and jealousies in the council meetings led to inefficient exploration, typified by the confusing double nomenclature given to several inlets on the west coast of the Bay. Some valuable surveying work had been done, particularly in the Wager and near Chesterfield Inlet, but the expedition had not brought back that conclusive evidence which would prove or disprove the existence of a passage, and maps published in the accounts of Ellis and Drage showed that the stretch of coast between Eskimo Point and the Wager had still not been completely charted. No greater contrast could be made than that between the overlapping, disjointed surveys of this expedition, and the methodical explorations of George Vancouver on the northwest coast of America fifty years later, when confronted with a problem similar in form but vastly greater in extent.

One other difference in circumstance besides the want of a

¹ Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, p. 303.

resolute captain must be taken into account. The Moor expedition suffered from the scourge of scurvy, and as the *California* sailed out of the Wager the crew were so weak that Smith had to take the helm, while the mate went aloft to reef the sails. Two days later Ellis, who alone appears to have kept his enthusiasm for exploration, went ashore on the east coast of the Welcome to test the tide. After finding it to flow from the north, as Middleton had always maintained, he was only able to return through heavy seas to the ship with great difficulty. At the subsequent council meeting an officer from the *Dobbs Galley* refused to go ashore with the boat again, and he was supported by the petty officers and men. Faced with this threat of mutiny, and with Moor's report that one-third of his crew were too ill to come on deck, the council decided 'to get home as soon as possible with the Ships'.¹

The passage through Hudson Strait was stormy and cold, and more sailors went down with scurvy. Drage justly pointed out that matters would have been considerably worse if the expedition had delayed to examine Repulse Bay, as Ellis had suggested. When the ships arrived at the Orkneys Moor reported that three of his crew had died on the voyage across the Atlantic, and Smith sent his sick men ashore and borrowed an officer and some men from a man-of-war at Cairston to help navigate the *California*. The two ships finally reached the Thames in the middle of October 1747, their crews in little better condition than Middleton's had been on his return five years earlier, and their captains with a gloomy report to make to the expectant Dobbs and the North West Committee.

¹ Smith Journal, 26 Aug. 1747. HBC E 18/2, f. 61r.

The Years of Debate

AFTER the return of Moor's ships with their dispirited crews from Hudson Bay, the enthusiasm for discovery that had led to the passing of the 1745 Act and the raising of funds for the expedition quickly abated; and the London merchants, whose support was essential to Dobbs, turned to the more rewarding prospect that had always been an important feature of their calculations, the abolition of the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company. There were some who still believed that a navigable passage existed, but their zeal was merged with the general attack on the Company, and although much was made of the alleged difference between the Company's attitude towards the discovery of a passage and that of the North West Committee, little was heard of definite plans for further exploration in the Bay. The details of the campaign against the Company lie outside the scope of this study, and the events of 1748 and 1749, the withdrawal of Dobbs from the struggle, the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee to investigate conditions and trade in Hudson Bay, and its verdict that the Company's monopoly should remain intact, have been described elsewhere.¹ Here our chief concern is with the information that can be gleaned from the debate regarding opinion about the Northwest Passage.

Soon after the return of the expedition in October 1747 the ships were sold and the crews paid off, but the North West Committee was evidently dissatisfied with the conduct of Moor

¹ There are good short accounts of the campaign against the Company in Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp. 217-26; Rich, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, I, pp. 581-4; and introduction to *Isham's Observations*, pp. xcii-xcix.

and Smith, and their behaviour was still being investigated in the following February.¹ The opportunity of holding the two disputatious captains responsible for the failure to find a passage was too good to miss, and in 1749 Dobbs was still claiming that he and his associates had been 'defeated in their Expectations, by the Timidity, ill Conduct, or bad inclinations of some of the Commanders and Council'.² The expedition itself had cost £1,500 more than had been raised by subscription, and in February 1748 Samuel Smith appealed to the original shareholders to make up this deficit, describing the benefits they would obtain if the petition presented by the North West Committee to the Privy Council the previous month were successful. This petition illustrated the new direction of the Committee's policy, for it asked that the subscribers to the 1746 expedition be granted a charter for a limited number of years, during which they would have the same rights in all lands they discovered as the Hudson's Bay Company had in its settlements.³ The twin justification of this demand was made clear by Smith in his letter to the shareholders: 'The prayer of our petition is founded upon the great expense the subscribers have been at in the late attempt, the probability of a Passage, and the great loss the public sustained by the Company not settling and enlarging the trade of that vast continent'.⁴ The North West Committee was advancing the same claim as it believed the subscribers to the voyage of the *Nonsuch* in 1668 had done, and it consequently asserted an equal right to a charter.⁵ At the same time, the campaign that had started in 1744 with the publication of

¹ See letter from Samuel Smith to subscribers to the expedition, 8 Feb. 1748. Printed in Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, pp. 212–13.

² [Arthur Dobbs], *A Short Narrative and Justification of the Proceedings of the Committee Appointed by the Adventurers, to prosecute the Discovery of the Passage to the Western Ocean of America* (London, 1749), p. 6.

³ *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series*, III, pp. 776–7.

⁴ Smith to subscribers, 8 Feb. 1748. Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, p. 213.

⁵ The Company's charter stated that the subscribers to the 1668 expedition were being incorporated as they 'have, at their own great Cost and Charges, undertaken an Expedition for . . . the Discovery of a new Passage into the South-Sea, and for the finding of some Trade for Furs, Minerals, and other considerable Commodities'. *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, Appendix I, p. i.

Dobbs' *Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay* was intensified to expose the Company's lack of energy in developing the territories granted to it.

The Privy Council appointed the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General to report on the petition, and whereas the Company pleaded before the two Law Officers that Dobbs and his merchant associates were using the question of the Northwest Passage as a pretext for attacking its charter, the North West Committee claimed that the Moor expedition had gone far towards discovering the passage, and hinted that, if granted a charter to trade, it would organize a further discovery expedition.¹ It was now that Ellis' account of the voyage, published in the summer of 1748, played its part. Ellis was the official apologist and historian of the expedition, and the last section of his book was characteristically entitled, 'the great Probability of a Passage . . . notwithstanding the same was not actually discovered in the Last Expedition'. His belief in the existence of a passage was based mainly on tidal observations, and he added little new to Dobbs' theories. The only explanation, considered Ellis, that accounted for the high tides on the west coast of Hudson Bay was that somewhere along that coast there was a short connecting strait with the Pacific. Although Middleton had been proved correct on other points in dispute, Ellis ignored his suggestion that the flood-tide flowing through Frozen Strait was responsible for the unusually high tides in the Bay, and instead pointed to two places in the Bay which had not been thoroughly explored and where the entrance to the passage might lie: Repulse Bay and Chesterfield Inlet. In conclusion, he stressed the danger that foreigners might discover the passage, especially as the Russians were pushing eastward from Asia, and argued that

another Expedition, properly conducted, cannot fail of producing an absolute Certainty whether there is such a Passage or not; and since this is a Thing out of Dispute, it seems to be incompatible with our Reputation, as a Maritime Power, as well as inconsistent

¹ Smith to subscribers, 8 Feb. 1748. Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, p. 213.

with our Interests, as a trading Nation, to abandon a Design, that has been prosecuted so far, and wants so little, so very little, of being compleated.¹

Such appeals failed to move the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, and they returned an unfavourable opinion on the petition. They gave credit to the efforts made by the North West Committee to find a passage, but were diplomatically non-committal on the question of its existence: 'As to the Petitioners merit, it consists in the late Attempts made to discover the same Passage; which, however as yet unsuccessful in the main Point, may probably be of Use hereafter in that Discovery, if it ever be made.'² The Privy Council's confirmation in December 1748 of the opinion of the Law Officers was an unexpected blow to Dobbs, who thought he had the backing of such prominent members of the government as the Duke of Dorset (Lord President of the Council), Lord Chesterfield, Lords Anson and Vere Beauclerk (who between them virtually dictated naval policy), and Newcastle's influential secretary Andrew Stone.³ Their failure to intervene effectively on his behalf seems to show that Dobbs mistook their lukewarm and reluctant interest in the theories he persistently thrust in front of them for a promise of active support. In his talks with them Dobbs had evidently still emphasized the importance of finding a passage—in the letter to Ward he referred to the whole project as 'my Northwest Passage scheme'—but the real intent behind the petition was revealed in the optimistic flourish with which he concluded his report to Ward, 'Most people think that the Company will be glad to drop their own Charter and come in as Sharers in the new Charter upon our terms.'

After the rejection of the petition Dobbs determined to lay the matter before Parliament, but his decision to follow the precedent of 1745 did not meet with success on this occasion,

¹ Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's-Bay*, pp. 332–3.

² Report of D. Ryder and W. Murray to Privy Council, 10 Aug. 1748. Printed in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1749, p. 78.

³ See Dobbs to Ward, 26 Dec. 1747. Castle Ward Papers, Bk. VI, p. 142. Chesterfield resigned as Secretary of State in February 1748.

even though a Committee of the House of Commons was set up to consider the conditions and trade in Hudson Bay. A variety of witnesses was summoned before the Committee: Company servants and ex-servants, members of the Moor expedition, merchants opposed to the Company monopoly, and Dobbs himself. The replies of most witnesses to questions about the Northwest Passage followed predictable lines, although William Moor's evidence was surprisingly non-partisan (perhaps as a result of the cool treatment he received from the North West Committee on his return from the Bay in 1747), and he gave a fair and moderate account of Isham's behaviour during the discovery expedition's stay at York. He thought there was a Northwest Passage, but because it was farther north than he had expected, he was uncertain whether it was navigable.¹ Company captain George Spurrell was more definite on this subject, 'I think there's no North W. passage betwn. Lat. 51 and 61 I know there's none, Impractical to Navigate, if one', and Isham was frankly sceptical, 'I've asked Indns. abt. N.W. passage but never rd. any Satisfy. Answr.'² Edward Thompson's evidence was for the most part a rehash of statements he had made at the time of the Middleton controversy.³ He repeated the old accusations against the captain, and once again described Indian reports of the sea to the west, 'not far distant', and the copper mine near a deep and spacious strait which 'has a communication with the Bay and the South Sea'. He criticized Isham's conduct towards the Moor expedition, and his account of the discovery of Chesterfield Inlet confirmed the impression given by Ellis' book, that although Moor and Smith had not considered the inlet of sufficient importance to warrant further exploration on the way home, it was there that hopes of a passage now ostensibly lay.

But most significant of the statements made before the Committee were those from four of the merchants associated with

¹ *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, pp. 41-5.

² HBC E 18/1, ff. 197r, 199r. These are extracts from a document in the Company archives containing a transcript of some minutes of the Parliamentary Committee between 4 and 8 May 1749 which were not printed in the published report.

³ *Parliamentary Report*, 1749, pp. 25-30.

Dobbs. Although they had not sought publicity they posed the real threat to the Company. They had supplied the organization and much of the capital for the 1746 expedition, and would be largely responsible for financing any future voyage to the Bay. None of the four would deny the existence of a Northwest Passage, for clearly such a repudiation would justify the Company's stand on this subject, but it was equally clear that they were not prepared to invest money in a further expedition of discovery. Both John Hanbury of London, who had been a subscriber to the 1746 venture, and John Hardman of Liverpool, made the same point: the failure of two expeditions within a few years had discouraged attempts to discover a passage. The only realistic approach was to leave the question of a passage to be settled naturally with the extension of trade and increase of population which would follow the opening of the Bay to merchants.¹ William Wansey of Bristol was slightly more optimistic about the chances of a passage being found, and referred to the inducement of the £20,000 reward. He even expressed willingness to invest £200 or £300 in another expedition, but insisted on an important proviso, 'as well with a view to the Extension of the Trade, as to the furthering the aforesaid Discovery'.² It was left to John Tomlinson, one of the members of the North West Committee, to throw cold water on the hopes of those who still believed there was a passage, and wished for one final voyage to discover it. In a manner most disconcerting to Dobbs he showed that he had lost any interest he might originally have had in the passage, and that although he had invested money in the 1746 expedition 'he should not chuse to subscribe again upon the same Terms; that he cannot pretend to say whether there is such a Passage or not, or whether, if found, it could be ever rendered useful to Navigation'.³

One reason for the merchants' lack of interest in the passage was the growing realization that the difficulties which Moor's ships had encountered in passing through Hudson Strait greatly diminished the commercial practicability of a passage, even if

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

one were discovered. Not only would ships have to be strengthened, and captains engaged who were experienced in ice navigation, but with one end of the passage blocked by ice for three-quarters of the year, it could obviously be used only for a restricted season. Even with careful timing, there would always be the possibility that ships coming through the passage from the west would arrive at Hudson Strait too late to pass into the Atlantic, and would be trapped in the Bay for the winter. None knew more about conditions in Hudson Strait than Captain Coats, whose comments on the difficulties of entering and leaving the Bay were written with the intensity of a seaman who in 1736 had seen his ship sink in twenty minutes among the clashing ice-floes at the entrance of the Strait:

And as it is very hazardous to enter the streights before the beginning of July, for ice, so it is dangerous to be in that bay after the middle of September; the gales of wind and snow setts in for a continuance, with very short calm intervals; the severe frosts are such that you cannot work a ship; possibly as the frost prevails the winds decrease, but to what purpose? When blocks are locks, and ropes are bolts, and sails can neither be taken in nor left out, is surely the last extremity; the new ice near the shores and rivers, and the wash of the sea, stick to your ship and ropes like bird-lime, cand in your sails like pitch, and so all opperations by water ceasis.¹

A safe use of the passage was hardly possible unless the Bay posts could be used as wintering-places in an emergency; and this meant that they had to be in the hands of those organizing the trade through the passage. Tomlinson and the other merchants were adopting the only practical approach to the problem when they insisted that the abolition of the Company monopoly must precede any further independent expeditions of discovery.

The evidence produced by the Company before the Parliamentary Committee reflected its anxiety to show that it had made serious attempts to find a passage, and it presented the Committee with an imposing list of 'Vessels fitted out by the Hudson's-Bay Company on Discovery of a North-West Pass-

¹ Barrow, *Geography of Hudson's Bay*, pp. 90-1.

age'.¹ The list, in fact, consisted mainly of slooping expeditions sent north from Churchill or York after 1719 to trade with the Eskimos, and was thoroughly misleading. Censure of the Company should not be too severe on this account. Its record of exploration, though far from inspiring, was not as dismal as its opponents maintained, but its traditional policy of strict secrecy now placed it at a serious disadvantage. Only its own servants knew that many of the accusations brought against the Company were false. For many years the Company had taken the utmost care to ensure that no hint of its trading and exploring activities should be noised abroad, and it was ironic that in 1749 it diligently strove to publicize those expeditions about which it had hitherto been so reticent.

Also in 1749, in time to make its contribution to the debate, was published the second volume of Drage's account of the Moor expedition. As the author was not involved in the struggle between the Company and its opponents, and had experienced in person the hardships and disillusionments of the voyage, his conclusions on the Northwest Passage are of more than usual interest. Ellis' theories he regarded with considerable scepticism, and he refused to accept the agent's contention that the tides of Hudson Bay, and in particular those of Chesterfield Inlet, could only be explained by a passage through the inlet. Drage preferred to regard that opening as 'only an Inlet, the End of which hath not been determined'.² Drage's reasoning up to this point had been cautious and sound, and so his partial acceptance of the Fonte letter is the more surprising. Considered individually, neither that letter, Lok's account of the Fuca voyage, nor Indian reports of a sea to the west, provided proof that a passage existed. It was the cumulative effect of these accounts which impressed Drage, and distrustful though he was of the theories of Dobbs and Ellis, he could only conclude, after discussing the various reports of a passage, that 'These Circumstances . . .

¹ *Parliamentary Papers*, 1749, Paper No. II, pp. 3-4.

² Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, p. 303.

greatly staggers me in my Opinion, as to whether there is a Passage or not.¹

In addition to the works of Ellis and Drage, at least five pamphlets were published at this time on the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company, and on the Northwest Passage. Of particular interest are copies of two of these pamphlets, written anonymously by Dobbs, which were annotated at the time by a Committee member of the Hudson's Bay Company.² In *A Short State of the Countries and Trade of North America. Claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company*, Dobbs followed the line of attack he had employed in his earlier *Account*, and accused the Company of failing to develop the potential trade of the Bay region, and of leaving the way open for the French. He repeated his opinion that the climate of the Bay was milder, and the navigation of its waters easier, than the Company asserted, and then turned to the question of the Northwest Passage. The contrast between the highflown, imaginative ideas of Dobbs (strikingly similar in places to those of James Knight) and the cautious, essentially practical policies of the Company, is nowhere better illustrated than in those pages of the pamphlet where Merry's derisory marginal comments accompany Dobbs' excited reflections on the advantages which the discovery of a passage would bring.³ Gold, silver and precious stones from the rich and civilized nations reported along the Pacific seaboard of North America would then lie within the reach of British merchants, claimed Dobbs; but the annotator's deflating comment reminded readers that 'When the Sky falls a great Number of Larks may be catched'.

The pamphlet revealed one significant change of policy: Dobbs no longer advocated another full-scale expedition to search for the passage. Instead, he agreed with the merchants on the North West Committee that trade must precede discovery. It seems

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

² According to a note by R. Leveson-Gower, onetime archivist of the Hudson's Bay Company, the annotator was either John Merry or his brother Robert.

³ *A Short State of the Countries and Trade of North America. Claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company* (London, 1749), pp. 22-3.

likely that Dobbs only consented reluctantly to this change, and that it was growing disagreement between him and the merchants, as much as any premonition of the failure of the campaign against the Company, that led to his retirement from the struggle early in 1749. Although Dobbs had been unscrupulous in his use of the question of the passage as a method of embarrassing the Company, there can be little doubt of the sincerity of his conviction that a passage existed; and a few shreds of evidence seem to show that before his withdrawal from active participation in the campaign against the Company he had tried to organize a third expedition to the Bay. In May 1748 the Company informed its factors in the Bay of the failure of the Moor expedition, but warned them to remain on their guard since the *Dobbs Galley* was being refitted in Ireland in preparation for another expedition.¹ The writer of a lengthy poem on the Northwest Passage published in 1752 stated that his verses (written in 1748) were inspired by the news that on the return of Moor's expedition 'the generous Reviver of that noble Design had determined to prosecute the Discovery the Year following in his own Person'.² Dobbs himself maintained in one of his pamphlets that only the Company's obstruction to the hearing of his petition in 1748 prevented discovery ships being sent to the Bay that year, but Merry commented in the margin, 'Mr Dobs had no mind to send out ships on Acct. of the Charge etc., and the Compy. did nothing to prevent him'.³ Merry was probably correct, and it is doubtful whether any serious preparations were made for a voyage in 1748. Many years later Drage implied that another expedition had been considered, but that 'The Adventurers differing amongst themselves on settling their accounts, all designs for a further Expedition were dropped':⁴

¹ Committee to Howie, 3 May 1748. HBC B 135 C/1, f. 8.

² *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs Esq. from a Clergyman in America* (London, 1752), introduction.

³ [Arthur Dobbs], *A Short Narrative and Justification of the Proceedings of the Committee Appointed by the Adventurers, to prosecute the Discovery of the Passage to the Western Ocean of America* (London, 1749), p. 8.

⁴ Drage to Earl of Hillsborough, 7 July 1768. Printed in H. N. Eavenson, *Swaine and Drage—A Sequel* (privately printed, 1950).

and Smith's letter to the shareholders in February 1748 shows that the two discovery ships had been sold by that time. Towards the end of 1749 it was rumoured that Ellis had persuaded the Admiralty to send an expedition to the northwest coast of America to search for the Pacific entrance of the passage,¹ but no action was taken on his plan, and fifteen years passed before any naval expedition of discovery sailed for the Pacific.

Nevertheless, it was an indication of the importance still attached to the question of a passage by the North West Committee in its campaign against the Company that one of its pamphlets was devoted entirely to *Reasons to shew, that there is a great Probability of a Navigable Passage to the Western American Ocean, through Hudson's Streights, and Chesterfield Inlet*. Though ingeniously argued, the pamphlet clearly reveals the weakness of the case for a Northwest Passage after the unsuccessful expeditions of Middleton and Moor. Dobbs' theory had been shattered. There was no great strait northwest of the Welcome, and no strong tide flowing into Hudson Bay from a nearby western ocean. Those who still believed a passage existed were brought to the stage where they either had to argue that the presence of a tide from the west was no longer necessary as an indication of a passage, or that a tide described by all who saw it as an ebb-tide (for example, in Chesterfield Inlet) was actually a flood-tide. As the foundations upon which Dobbs had originally based his theory became flimsier with each discovery, increasing emphasis was placed on the accounts of the Fonte and Fuca voyages, and interest in these myths later became the main stimulus in arousing fresh enthusiasm for the discovery of a passage.

While Dobbs and his associates sought by means of books and pamphlets to gain the support of statesmen, merchants and economists, the Company confined its appeal to the arena where the controversy was to be settled, the House of Commons. It produced for the enlightenment of members a pamphlet and

¹ See *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX (Dec. 1749), pp. 570-1. There is no mention of this scheme in the Admiralty records, but a reference in a later document seems to show that sometime in this period Anson was considering whether to send a naval expedition to the north Pacific. See p. 160, *infra*.

petition which were concise and telling replies to the spate of anti-Company propaganda. *The Case of the Hudson's-Bay Company*, as the short pamphlet written by the Company's solicitor, Sharpe, was simply entitled, pointed out that the Company had sent several ships to search for the passage, and insisted that the sole aim of the North West Committee was the seizure of the Company's hard-won trade. With dry irony Sharpe probed the weak places in the associates' case, and concluded that:

These late private Adventurers finding their Attempts in search of a North-west Passage had not answered their Expectations, and being tired with the Expence of one Expedition, and, it is believed, satisfied in general that there was no such Passage, and being disappointed in their Hopes of the 20,000l. Reward they had not been able to merit, they (instead of further pursuing new Discoveries) turned their Thoughts towards getting Settlements in old ones, as that was more sure, and a ready Way to reimburse themselves.¹

Dobbs, on the other hand, had sought to show that the merchants attacking the Company chiefly desired the opening of the Bay trade so that the passage might be found, but the numerous petitions sent to the House of Commons in 1749 protesting against the Company's monopoly provide little evidence to support Dobbs' contention. Of the twenty-eight petitions presented by the trading cities and towns of Britain, only five contain any reference to the Northwest Passage.² No more convincing proof could be found that in the opinion of the merchants who had taken over the campaign from Dobbs the question of a passage was relegated to a position of minor importance.

The last petition presented to the Commons came from the Company itself, on 1 May 1749, and that also reflected the changed attitude towards the Northwest Passage. The Company was able to request with a certain amount of confidence that it should not be condemned because its Governor and Committee had 'not persisted to waste their Capital in looking for a Passage,

¹ *Case of the Hudson's-Bay Company*, p. 2.

² See *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXV, pp. 810-852.

which they have no reason to think exists';¹ and that same month the Commons decided that there was no case for ending the Company's monopoly. With this verdict, the search for the Northwest Passage by privately financed expeditions was to all intents and purposes finished, for only with the added bait of a share in the Company's trading profits could enthusiasts for a passage tempt wealthy but sceptical merchants to finance a venture to the Bay. Dobbs himself always remained convinced that one day a passage would be found, but after the disillusionments of 1748 and 1749 he bequeathed the task of seeking it to 'some more happy Adventurer'.² His own interest in the question of the passage and the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company became of necessity a distant one, since in 1752 he was informed of his forthcoming appointment as Governor of North Carolina, and there he lived from 1754 until his death eleven years later.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 852.

² [Dobbs], *Short Narrative*, p. 13.

*Renewed Interest by the Hudson's Bay
Company in the Passage*

ALTHOUGH in England the danger of a frontal attack on the Hudson's Bay Company by Dobbs and his associates receded after 1749, in the Bay the competition of the encroaching French traders remained, and during the decade after the Parliamentary inquiry the Company undertook a policy of cautious expansion. Anthony Henday's expedition from York to within sight of the Rocky Mountains was the most spectacular manifestation of this slowly changing policy, but there were others. Joseph Smith and Joseph Waggoner also journeyed into the interior, sloops from Albany explored the Eastmain coast as far as Cape Digges, and a small post was established at Richmond in an unsuccessful attempt to exploit the Labrador trade.¹ At Churchill this gradual expansion was marked by a more determined effort to develop trade to the north by way of regular slooping voyages along the west coast of the Bay; and it was through these voyages, and the increasing curiosity of the factors and sloop-masters at the farthest north of the Company posts, that the question of the Northwest Passage arose once more.

Instructions regarding the new series of expeditions to the north were sent to Joseph Isbister at Churchill in the same month as the Company's petition of 1749 to the House of Commons stated that repeated attempts had shown the futility of expecting to find a passage through Hudson Bay. The factor was directed to send James Walker in the *Churchill* sloop northward from the fort the next spring.² After touching at various

¹ For further details see Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp. 228-9, 243-52; Rich, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, I, Chs. XLII and XLIII.

² Committee to Isbister, 16 May 1749. HBC A 6/8, ff. 17v-18v.

places along the west coast to trade with the Eskimos, Walker was to examine the region around Whale Cove for a suitable spot for a settlement. He was then to sail as far north as possible, examining all inlets and being 'very particular' in noting the height and course of the tides. Although the importance of tidal observations had been stressed in the search for the Northwest Passage in the preceding years, it is doubtful whether much significance should be attached to this part of Walker's instructions; Captain Coats in his explorations along the Eastmain coast that year was also ordered to note the tides. On any coastal voyage of exploration details of the tides were a legitimate, almost routine, object of investigation. The probings of successive inquiries in 1748 and 1749 had clearly made the Company sensitive to allegations that outsiders knew more about the geography of the Bay than its own servants, and the list of topographical queries sent to the factor at York the next year was accompanied by the trenchant criticism, 'it is surprising to us that none of our Factors or Servants have had the Curiosity of Informing themselves thereof especially of places not far from York Fort'.¹

The same lack of initiative about which the Committee complained in its letter to York in 1750 was also shown on Walker's voyage that year.² It was a repetition of the unhappy expedition of 1737 under Napper's command, and demonstrated that although the Committee in London could make preparations and draw up instructions, this availed it little without enterprising leaders in the Bay. Walker reached Whale Cove on 20 July, but after staying there five days scraping the sloop and repairing nets he sailed for Churchill without making any attempt to survey the region. By 28 July the sloop was back at the fort, although at least three weeks of the navigable season still remained, and the Committee's orders of 1749 had emphasized that after Walker had explored and traded near Whale Cove, 'he

¹ Committee to Newton, 21 May 1750. *Ibid.*, f. 46r.

² Walker's journals for 1750-4 are to be found in HBC B 42/a/35, 37, 39, 41, 43.

is not to be confined to return to the factory so soon as formerly but go as far Northward as he can with safety so as to be able to return to the factory only before the frost sets in.¹ In 1751, after reaching Whale Cove, Walker sailed north for two days to latitude 64° N., but his journal shows that he did not approach the land closely at any time. His usual procedure was to sail within two or three miles of the shore, and fire a gun to attract the Eskimos in their canoes. Whatever the merits of this policy, it meant that the thorough examination of the coastline envisaged by the Committee was out of the question. That the Committee was in earnest cannot be doubted, and when Walker arrived back at Churchill he found there a new strong sloop, 'Being determined', the Committee wrote to Isbister, 'to enlarge the Trade to the Northward as much as possible'.²

Again, the Committee stressed that Walker was to sail as far north beyond Whale Cove as possible and, in addition to trading with the Eskimos, was to make drafts of every new cove, bay and inlet that he discovered. Isbister added to these general instructions a more specific directive which marked the beginning of a new phase in the search for a Northwest Passage. He ordered Walker 'in particular to search in and about the Latd 64 where we have an Information from the Natives that there is a large Inlett Leading a great way in to the Country which if found out may prove of great Advantage to the Company'.³ Isbister gave no indication whether he thought that this inlet (called by the Indians Kish-Stack-Ewen) might conceivably be the entrance to the passage, but there is reason to suppose that this possibility occurred to his successor at Churchill, Ferdinand Jacobs. Correspondence between Jacobs and Isham in 1754 shows that they had both read Robson's *Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay*,⁴ much of which was devoted to berating the Company for its reluctance to search for the Northwest Passage. Robson followed Dobbs and Ellis in pointing to

¹ Committee to Isbister, 16 May 1749. HBC A 6/8, f. 17v.

² Committee to Isbister, 16 May 1751. *Ibid.*, f. 71r.

³ Walker Journal, 21 June 1752. HBC B 42/a/39, f. 111.

⁴ See HBC 42/b/1a, ff. 3r, 6v.

Chesterfield Inlet, which lay in almost the same latitude as the opening for which Walker was searching, as the probable entrance to the passage. The experienced Company factors would have little patience with the wilder theories of Robson and other critics of the Company regarding a passage, but they could not help being aware that the exploration of a large inlet on the west coast of the Bay in latitude 64° N. was of more than local importance.

Nor was the Committee in London allowed to forget the Northwest Passage. By 1753 there was mounting interest in England in the controversy between English and French geographers over Fonte's supposed discoveries; and numerous books, pamphlets and maps were published on the Fonte letter and the possibility of a passage.¹ Furthermore, the verdict of the House of Commons in 1749 had not halted the attacks on the Company, and the compilers of a history of America published in 1757 expressed a still popular opinion when they declared that the Company's monopoly should be abolished, in order that 'this more general trade on the bay would naturally, without any new expence or trouble whatsoever, in a very short space of time discover to us the so much desired North-West Passage, or shew us clearly and definitely that we ought to expect no such thing'.²

But the northern voyages until 1754 revealed only Walker's inadequacy as an explorer, and in the fall of that year he returned home, to be replaced as master of the *Churchill* sloop by John Bean, a seaman of courage and enterprise whose detailed journals provide a valuable record of the explorations along the west coast of the Bay in 1755 and 1756.³ With Bean on his first voyage sailed Moses Norton, half-breed son of former factor

¹ See Ch. VII.

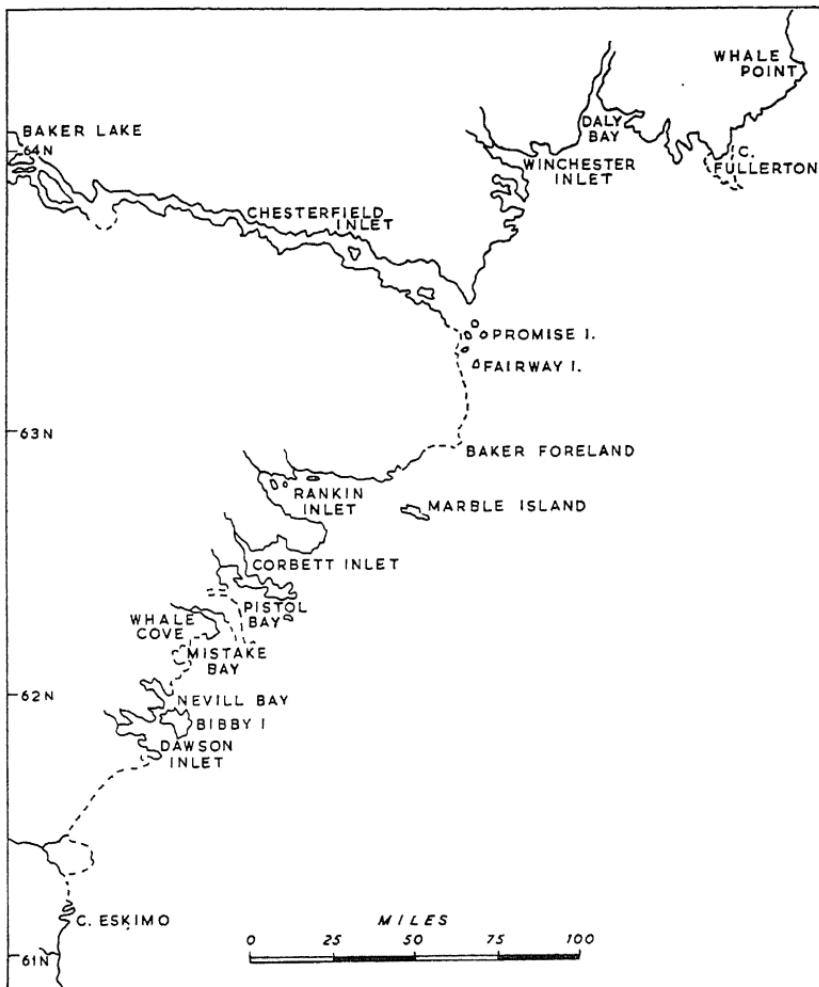
² [Edmund and William Burke], *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (London, 1757), II, p. 282. Another work which reproduced the arguments of Dobbs, Campbell and Robson, and ignored those put forward by the Company in 1748 and 1749, was Malachy Postlethwayt's *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce Translated from the French . . . of . . . Monsieur Savary . . . with large additions* (London, 1751-5).

³ Bean's journals for 1755 and 1756 are to be found in HBC B 42/a/45, 47.

Richard Norton, who was to play an important part in the northern explorations of the next fifteen years. In 1755 and 1756 Bean made a close examination of the coast from latitude 64° N. northward in search of the great inlet or river twelve miles wide, mentioned by Isbister and described in detail by Ellis and Drage; but he overlooked the entrance of Chesterfield Inlet, which lay between latitudes 63°28' N. and 63°36' N., slightly south of the region Bean explored in bad weather at considerable risk to his solitary vessel. Scathing references in his journal to the 'Discoverers of this fly away River' show that by the end of the 1756 season Bean was convinced that the reported opening did not exist, and on his last voyage in 1757 he made no attempt at exploration. The voyages of 1758 and 1760 (there was no voyage in 1759 because the sloop was damaged) were for trade only, and the sloop did not venture farther north than Whale Cove. The instructions given to the new master of the *Churchill*, James Wood, still urged him to go as far north as possible, and repeated the information given to Walker and Bean about the Kish-Stack-Ewen, but the reversion by Wood to short trading voyages shows that the amount of exploration carried out on these expeditions depended entirely on the inclination of the sloop-master.

In the fall of 1760 Moses Norton, who during the previous year had acted as chief factor at Churchill, sailed for England; and his interviews with the Committee, and the subsequent decision to pursue the northern discovery until it was complete, mark the beginning of the second and more important phase in the search for the mysterious inlet on the west coast of the Bay. The minute book for 1761 merely records that Norton was appointed second factor at Churchill for three years, and that at the end of that time he was to have a £40 gratuity 'as a recompence for his Trouble in Examining the Coast, to the North West of the said Fort in such manner as the Committee shall Direct';¹ but two manuscript maps which he drew from Indian inform-

¹ Committee Minutes, 18 March 1761. HBC A 1/41, f. 152r.



The West Coast of Hudson Bay

ation and brought to England reveal more details about the motives lying behind this decision to continue the exploration of the northwest coast of the Bay.¹ The first map covers the country north and northwest of Churchill, and shows near the banks of the Kish-Stack-Ewen deposits of salt, coal and pitch,

¹ The maps are classified in the Company archives as HBC G 1/19 and G 2/8.

and Indian tribes clothed in beaver and marten skins. The second map marks two copper mines close to the shore farther north. If the maps were to be trusted, here lay a region of great promise, and to the lure of minerals that had drawn Knight and Kelsey to the north was added news of Indians and furs along the banks of the Kish-Stack-Ewen. The river or inlet afforded the most obvious route for penetrating this unknown country to establish a trade which, together with that already secured with the Eskimos along the Bay shores, would enhance the importance of Churchill, and promote the Committee's traditional policy of turning the attention of the fort's factor towards the north and northwest, and away from the region of competition with York. Although some of the Company servants at Churchill were intrigued by the possibility that the Kish-Stack-Ewen might prove to be the entrance to the Northwest Passage, there can be little doubt that the main reason for the Company's continued interest in exploration to the north sprang from Norton's report of a region rich in minerals and furs to the west of the inlet.

Norton sailed for Hudson Bay in June 1761 with orders to make a determined search for the river, but when he reached Churchill he found that the new sloop-master, William Christopher, had anticipated him on his first voyage to the north that summer. The journal of this important expedition is missing, and our only information about it comes from letters written by the factor at Churchill, Ferdinand Jacobs. In August he wrote to the Committee that Christopher had discovered 'The Straights, but I think more Properly River' Kish-Stack-Ewen, up which he had sailed a hundred miles before being turned back by contrary winds, and that the sloop-master intended to explore the inlet further the next year.¹ To Robert Temple at Albany went a more detailed description which shows that although Christopher and Norton (as their later letters indicate) hoped that the newly discovered inlet might lead to the South Sea or to the copper mines, their prosaic chief factor was con-

¹ Jacobs to Committee, 24 Aug. 1761. HBC A 11/13, f. 165r.

templating expansion of the Company's trade in a more conventional way: 'it is the Only River we have found or heard of as yet that bids Fair to Extend the Companys Trade into the Heart of the Country'.¹ More than one factor lamented that no great navigable river flowed into the Bay by means of which the Company could penetrate easily and swiftly into the interior, and in London the Committee also expressed the 'greatest Satisfaction' at the news of Christopher's discovery. It added, significantly, that it hoped that on the voyage of 1762 to the inlet he would find out 'whether the same be a Streight or passage, or not'.²

At Churchill thorough preparations were made for the expedition under the supervision of Christopher and Norton, both of whom were going on the voyage.³ A cutter was fitted with washboards so that it could be towed by the sloop, and was named the *Strivewell*. Christopher, who had discovered the inlet on his first voyage to the north, and Norton, ambitious and energetic, made a formidable team, and even the name given to the cutter conveyed a spirit of determination sadly lacking on some of the earlier voyages. On 13 July the sloop and cutter sailed from Churchill with a touch of ceremony which indicated that they were bound on something more than the usual routine trading voyage, for the crew 'Salut'd the Fort with 7 guns and three Cheers'. However, thick ice retarded the sloop to such an extent that it took a fortnight to reach the entrance of Chesterfield Inlet, and progress would have been even slower without the cutter, which went ahead and found channels through the ice. Until 3 August the expedition was merely retracing Christopher's track of the previous year up the inlet, and its chief preoccupation, apart from naming salient features after dignitaries of the Company, was taking soundings and measuring the tide. The tide rose and fell fifteen feet at the entrance of the inlet, but gradually decreased to nine feet when the expedition

¹ Jacobs to Temple, 17 June 1762. HBC B 42/b/8, f. 4r.

² Committee to Jacobs, 24 May 1762. HBC A 6/10, f. 31v.

³ Their journals are in HBC B 42/a/57, 58.

was one hundred and thirty miles up the inlet. Here the country was regular, with grass, herbs and small flowers to be seen as well as partridges and deer. All this time the cutter sailed in front, taking soundings and signalling to the sloop, which on 5 August it towed through a narrow channel into a wide, tideless expanse of fresh water. At the western end of this lake the only opening found by Norton was a rivulet, two fathoms deep at its entrance, which shallowed to two feet after five or six miles, and finally petered out in a series of waterfalls and dry ridges.

Norton and Christopher had penetrated over two hundred miles into the continent, but their quest had ended in frustration and disappointment. They had not discovered a passage; nor had they seen the minerals, furs and woods reputed to lie along the banks of the Kish-Stack-Ewen. Norton noted in his journal that the inlet could be of no advantage to the Company or anyone else, and Christopher concluded: 'now having Strictly Search'd and Examin'd all Bays and Places that had the least Probability of an opening or Branch, and finding none are Assured of the Rivers Terminating in a Lake . . . thus Ends Mr. Bowden's Inlet, and of a late Authors Probability of a NW Passage'.¹ The letters written to the Committee after the expedition's return reflected the disappointment at Churchill about the outcome of the discovery voyage, although Christopher, after describing how the inlet was found to terminate in an insignificant stream hardly deep enough for a canoe, 'Which plainly proves that further Progress to the Westward is Impracticable, and Consequently no Passage through this River or Inlet into the South Sea', wrote that he hoped the next year to explore an opening near Whale Cove.² The Committee approved this project, and at the same time expressed its satisfaction with the efforts made by Norton, now chief factor at Churchill, in exploring 'Chesterfield or Bowdens Inlet, which though it hath proved to be of no Consequence or Benefit, either to the Nation or the

¹ Christopher Journal, 17 Aug. 1762. HBC B 42/a/57, f. 21v.

² Christopher to Committee, 28 Aug. 1762. HBC A 11/13, f. 172r.

Company yet we commend your Diligence in so effectually fixing that point, as to put it beyond a Doubt hereafter'.¹

The Committee's emphasis on this somewhat negative side of the explorations made from Churchill was given added weight with the publication that year of a book by its old antagonist Joseph Robson. Robson repeated the accusations hurled against the Company fifteen years earlier, and then went on to describe a novel plan for discovering the Northwest Passage. It involved the stationing of leather boats in various parts of the Bay which, at a certain date, would carefully observe the time, strength and direction of the tide. 'The above Remarks', Robson claimed, 'being made by the Boats at their several Stations upon one and the same Day, and upon one and the same Tide, there can be no doubt of being directed to the right Place where you cannot miss of further Information, and if the Passage is practicable, you cannot fail of finding it'.² Ludicrous though Robson's plan was, it served to remind the Committee that if there was a new campaign against the Company—and from this time forward it would no longer be able to plead its special position as a bulwark against the French in support of its charter—and it was accused once more of deliberately neglecting the search for a passage, then it was essential that it should be able to produce evidence to the contrary. This evidence the explorations along the west coast of the Bay supplied to the Company, and if Chesterfield Inlet was again suggested as the entrance to the passage, the Committee would be able to produce journals and charts to show that it had been meticulously surveyed.³

In 1763 Christopher explored the region near Whale Cove, and in 1764 his successor Magnus Johnston the coast opposite Marble Island, but they found neither river nor strait. 'Nether do I Care who gos after me', declared Johnston, 'By my own

¹ Committed to Norton, 31 May 1763. HBC A 5/1, ff. 53r-53v.

² Joseph Robson, *The British Mars. Containing several Schemes and Inventions, To be Practised by Land or Sea against the Enemies of Great-Britain* (London, 1763), pp. 198-9.

³ A detailed contemporary map showing the discoveries of the 1761, 1762 and 1764 seasons is in the Company archives, HBC G 2/9.

knoladg and Mr. Nortens Deriections I am Certain it is finished'.¹ Norton himself wrote to the Committee after Johnston's return that he did not intend to send the sloop any farther north than Marble Island the next summer,

for I am Certain and Shure that there is no Pasage into the Western Ocan in this Hudsons Bay, and Inquiring into the Particulars of wch I have been very Sercumspect by all Inds that has come to this Place within this 2 years Some of which has Been so far to the Northward that the Sun dont Set about the month of June wch must be to the Northward of 70° North Latitude, and by what I can learn the River Kass-ca-che-wan also Emptys it self into Bafins Bay, But in Regard to this hope to give your Honrs a more periculer acct the next year when I hear from those Indns that I have Sent on that Porposs.²

Norton's decision to abandon the voyages of discovery to the north, and to concentrate on trading and whaling, confirms the impression given by his interviews with the Committee on his visit to England in 1760, his maps, his diligence in interrogating strange Indians at Churchill, and his presence on the expedition of 1762; that he was mainly responsible for the conception and execution of the plan of expansion to the north. Norton was fortunate in that he was served by men like Christopher and Hearne, but even so there are few better examples of the power that could be wielded in the Bay by one determined man with a free hand to translate the Committee's general instructions into detailed plans of operation.³

The Committee paid Norton the £40 gratuity promised him in 1761, and although it urged him to continue his inquiries among the Indians regarding rivers farther north than the sloop had sailed, agreed with his decision that the voyages of discovery were finished for the present, and that future expeditions should be chiefly concerned with trade. Norton's letter of 1764 showed that he had not given up hope that some large river might be

¹ Johnston Journal, 9 Aug. 1764. HBC B 42/a/61, f. 16Br.

² Norton to Committee, 24 Aug. 1764. HBC A 11/14, f. 3v.

³ For a less favourable estimate of Norton see Richard Glover's introduction to his recent edition of Hearne's *Journey to the Northern Ocean* (Toronto, 1958), pp. xi-xii, xx-xxii.

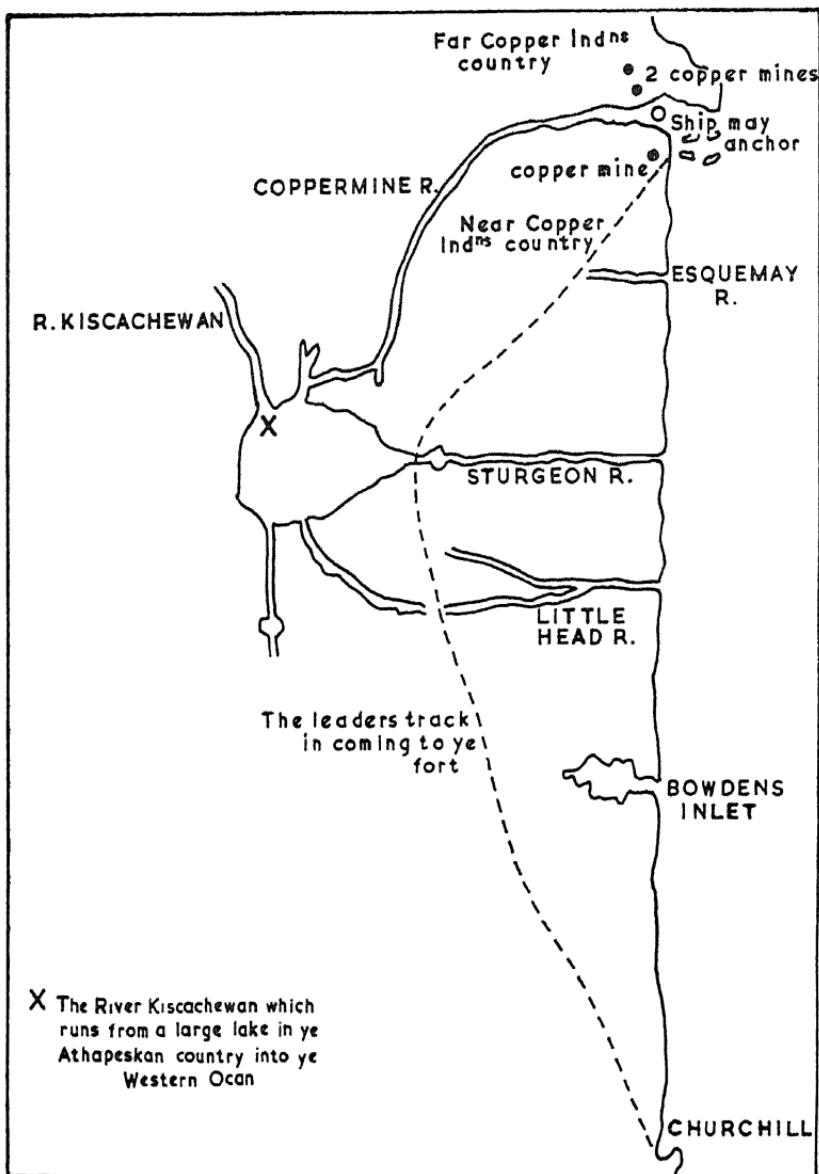
discovered north of Churchill, but his reference to the Indians he had sent overland from the fort in search of the river indicated that he had in mind an alternative method of discovery; and this change from exploration by sea to exploration by land led to Hearne's tremendous journey to the shores of the Arctic Ocean in search of the copper mines and the Northwest Passage.

The two Indians, Idotliaze and Mattonabee, sent northward by Norton, were away for five years, but when they returned to Churchill in 1767 they brought exciting news. Far to the north they claimed to have found a river which ran between three copper mines in a country abounding in wood and furs, and they made a map of their discoveries which Norton promised to bring to England the next year.¹ This map, endorsed with notes in the factor's handwriting, presents a fine puzzle to the investigator, because the west coast of Hudson Bay is shown extending as far north as the Coppermine River. Since the river actually lies upon an east-west coast, the draft brought home by Norton would approximate to a modern map only if the coast marked on it swung westward near 'Sturgeon River'. The large lake to the west is probably Great Slave Lake, or possibly Great Bear Lake, and the river running from it to 'ye Western Ocan' the Mackenzie. The significance of the map in 1768 (as in 1789 when Alexander Dalrymple rediscovered it) was that it implied a clear run for a ship from Churchill along the west coast of the Bay to the Coppermine River, and showed no indication of the Frozen Strait or Repulse Bay which Middleton had asserted blocked the way to the north.

The Committee discussed the map with Norton when he came to England in 1768, and heard 'his Sentiments for prosecuting an Inland Trade to the Northward of Prince of Wales Fort'.² Evidently the factor's arguments were as convincing as they had been eight years earlier, and in 1769 he returned to Churchill with the Committee's authorization to send Samuel Hearne,

¹ Norton to Committee, 9 Sept. 1767. HBC A 11/14, f. 78v. The map is classified in the Company archives as HBC G 2/27.

² Committee Minutes, 25 Jan. 1769. HBC A 1/43, f. 78r.



The West Coast of Hudson Bay: after Indian Sketch 1767

mate of one of the fort's sloops, on an overland journey to the north. Hearne was not only to seek trade and look for the copper mines: he was also instructed to investigate 'whether there is a Passage through this Continent where its pointed out in the Draught of the American Traveller'.¹ *The American Traveller* was the title of a work written anonymously by Alexander Clunie, and published in 1769, in which he advocated the planting of colonies in the Bay region.² One of the advantages of this step, Clunie pointed out, would be the discovery of the Northwest Passage, which his map showed running westward from Repulse Bay into the Arctic Ocean. The quick reaction of the Committee to this proposal, reflected in Norton's directions to Hearne, and the indignant response of Andrew Graham in the Bay, provide yet another example of the Company's sensitivity to criticism. Graham, clerk and later factor in the Bay, was justly incensed by the imaginary coastlines shown by Clunie on his map which, with capes at the western end of the passage bearing the names of two Company captains, Spurrell and Fowler, seemed to suggest that the Company had discovered the passage in the course of secret explorations in the far north of the Bay.³

Nevertheless, the Hearne expedition was not primarily a reaction to Clunie's book: it was the corollary of the efforts made since 1752 to discover a navigable waterway north of Churchill. The slooping voyages of Bean, Christopher and Johnston had explored the west coast of the Bay as far as it was judged

¹ Norton to Hearne, 6 Nov. 1769. HBC 11/14, f. 131v.

² *The American Traveller: or, Observations on the present state, culture and commerce of the British Colonies in America . . . By an old and experienced Trader* (London, 1769), pp. 11-31. A manuscript copy of the work is among the Dartmouth MSS., together with a letter from Clunie to the Earl of Dartmouth, 13 April 1769, which establishes his authorship of the book. See *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, 14th Report (London, 1895), Appendix Pt. X, p. 67.

³ Andrew Graham, 'Observations on Hudson's Bay'. HBC E 2/12, pp. 405-7. There are several volumes of Graham's 'Observations' in the Company archives, written by him at various times during his long service in the Bay. In this volume he pointed out that Clunie was a wharfinger who had spent only one winter in the Bay (in 1744), and had no opportunity of sailing northward from the Company posts.

practicable for a vessel to go. As Norton realized, the next move was discovery by land, farther north than the Company sloop could safely explore in the limited navigable season; and Hearne's instructions were similar to those which had been given to the sloop-masters. Christopher had also sought a great river, a copper mine and a strait to the South Sea, while Johnston had carried samples of copper to show the Eskimos in his endeavours to obtain information about the mine. With the failure of their attempts, and the return of the two Indians to Churchill in 1767, then the Hearne expedition was the next step, and had been foreseen by Joseph Robson almost twenty years earlier.¹

Hearne, after two unsuccessful starts, carried out his orders, and with the aid of Mattonabee crossed the barrens to reach the northern coastline of the continent (the first European ever to do so) and the Coppermine River. He found the river, the quest of so many explorers since Knight's day, disappointing in every respect. It was not navigable for ships, there were no fur-bearing animals on the bleak wastes of the Arctic shores, and the reported mines of copper dwindled to a few scattered lumps. Hearne placed the mouth of the river in latitude 71° 55' N., and with this single observation shattered current theories about the Northwest Passage. Whether it was the Wager, Chesterfield Inlet, or some as yet undiscovered opening in Hudson Bay that was alleged to be the entrance to the passage, it was now ruled out of consideration. Hearne had crossed the continent from Churchill to the Arctic Ocean without finding a salt-water strait or even any considerable river, and he was convinced that 'Though my discoveries are not likely to prove of any material advantage to the Nation at large, or indeed to the Hudson's Bay Company . . . it has put a final end to all disputes concerning a North West Passage through Hudson's Bay'.² Logically, the

¹ Robson, *Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay*, pp. 60-1. As early as 1743 James Isham had suggested an overland expedition to find the copper mine, but by two Europeans only. See Rich and Johnson, *Isham's Observations*, p. 180.

² Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p. 303.

coastal explorations by the Company sloopers, and the remarkable land journey of Hearne, should have dispelled all hope that there was a strait between Hudson Bay and the Pacific; but logic was a quality notably absent from discussions on the Northwest Passage, and within twenty years a new school of theorists had arisen which ignored or sought to invalidate the Company discoveries. Dalrymple, Duncan and Meares took the place of Dobbs, Ellis and Robson; and with even more ingenuity endeavoured to show that a navigable passage might yet exist.

Theory and Speculation

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the outline of the North American continent had been precisely delineated in all parts except the far north, and the search for the Northwest Passage was consequently confined to the frozen seas of the Arctic; but for much of the eighteenth century the continent west of the Great Lakes and north of California was *terra incognita*, a misty region where Jonathan Swift could place Gulliver's Brobdingnag without fear of contradiction. Because of lack of information about the northwest coast of America the search for a passage through Hudson Bay was largely a blind one: the South Sea might lie only a short distance away, as Dobbs insisted, or, as some cartographers suggested, thousands of miles to the west. To the navigators, geographers and merchants interested in the Northwest Passage the situation of the Pacific coast of North America was a far from academic question, and as its position and extent gradually became known, so theories about the passage, and the very nature of the quest, changed. Examination of these theories helps to explain why hope that a passage might be found survived even the disillusionments experienced by the discovery expeditions of the 1740s, and shows how the speculative geographers of the mid-eighteenth century were mainly responsible for that diversion of interest from Hudson Bay to the Pacific which characterized the search for a passage in the second half of the century.

With the British foiled in their endeavours to find a passage through the inlets of Hudson Bay, the French still falling short of the Rockies in their attempts to push westward along the rivers of the interior, and the Spaniards apparently moribund in

their Mexican settlements, it was the efforts of the energetic, cosmopolitan leaders of the Russian expeditions forcing their way eastward from Kamchatka through fog and ice that held the attention of geographers anxious to solve the mystery of the hidden American coastline north of California. The importance of Vitus Bering's voyages was recognized everywhere, but the significance of his discoveries remained long in dispute, and doubts about the extent and reliability of the explorations made on his two expeditions were increased by the failure of the Russians to publish any authoritative account of them until 1758.

The main objective of the Dane's first expedition was to determine the relationship between northeast Asia and northwest America, but although in 1728 he sailed through the strait which now bears his name, haze hid the American shore, and Bering failed to bring back definite information on the question of the separation of the two continents.¹ News of this momentous yet inconclusive voyage was slow in reaching Europe. Dobbs clearly knew nothing about it when he wrote the revised edition of his memorial on the Northwest Passage in 1733, and the first published account of the voyage appears to have been given by du Halde in his history of China, published in Paris in 1735. He included, without comment, a narrative of the voyage, and appended a map (obtained indirectly from Bering) which outlined the eastern tip of Asia, but showed nothing of America.² It provided the first definite indication that the two continents were divided, although by what extent of water it was impossible to tell, and calmed the fears of some geographers that a land-bridge between Asia and America blocked any possible strait to the Pacific.

In 1731 the Russian government decided to organize a second,

¹ Four years later Gwosdev sighted the American shore of the strait while he was on a voyage in Bering's old ship, but he thought the land was part of a large island.

² An English edition was published the following year, *The General History of China* (London, 1736), 4 vols. The Bering narrative was printed in volume IV, pp. 429-40.

more ambitious expedition, which was to complete the explorations made by Bering off the easternmost extremity of Asia, determine the position and trend of the northwest coast of America, and discover whether Yedso, Gama Land and Company Land existed.¹ Guided by a speculative map produced by Joseph Nicholas de l'Isle (a younger brother of the great Guillaume, and a member of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences), Bering eventually sailed in the spring of 1741 southeast from Kamchatka to latitude 45° N., where Company Land and Gama Land were thought to lie; but in seeking these imaginary lands the two ships went far out of their way, and eventually became separated with disastrous results. Bering's second-in-command Chirikov sighted the American coast in latitude 55°21' N., but there lost both his boats with their crews, was unable to land anywhere, and on his return voyage to Kamchatka touched only at one of the Aleutian islands. Bering meanwhile had headed northeast until he sighted Mount St Elias in Alaska after an unexpectedly long and gruelling voyage, and landed on a nearby island. He stopped there only long enough to get water, a decision which brought from Steller, his German naturalist, the biting comment that the expedition had been planned merely to fetch American water to Asia, and that ten years of preparation had resulted in ten hours of exploration.² The vessel, with its crew suffering grievously from scurvy, sailed back through the Kodiak, Shumagin and Aleutian islands, only to be wrecked on an island not far from Kamchatka where Bering and many of his crew died. The survivors reached Kamchatka the following summer (1742).

The journals kept on the expedition show that the explorers were convinced that they had landed in America: nevertheless, that careful examination of the coastline which was necessary

¹ Explorations in 1739-42 by part of the expedition under Spanberg finally determined that those lands were either insignificant islands in the Kurile chain, or non-existent.

² Steller's journal is contained in F. A. Golder's edition of *Bering's Voyages* (New York, 1922-5). For another contemporary account of the voyage see Sven Waxell, *The American Expedition*, transl. M. A. Michael (London, 1952).

before it could be generally accepted that the land sighted from the two vessels was in fact the continent of America, and that it was separated from Asia, had still not been carried out. Although the expedition was the first to outline in any way the unknown land across the ocean east of Kamchatka, there was room left for the expression of conflicting opinions; and whereas Leonard Euler, onetime professor at the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, wrote in 1746 from his home in Berlin that the new discoveries made it less likely that there was a navigable passage between Hudson Bay and the northwest coast of America, Dobbs and John Campbell maintained that the Russians had discovered only islands.¹ Campbell comforted himself with the argument that Bering, instructed to discover America, believed without any proof that the land he saw was the continent, just as Columbus when sent to find the Indies assumed that the islands he discovered were part of them. He concluded by referring to the secrecy which surrounded the expedition, and with that insular suspicion of the foreigner which embraced Russians, Spaniards and French alike, hinted that sinister motives determined the nature of the information allowed to leak out of Russia:

the few judicious Heads amongst them, are convinced, not of the Possibility or Probability, but of the Reality of a North-west Passage; and this it is that makes them so very desirous of promoting a Belief of the running out of the two great Continents, till they almost meet each other, and hath also put them upon the Scheme of stifling their future Discoveries, that they may make the most of what they have already discovered, and not lead others to the Knowledge of a Route, which would make them masters of these Discoveries, and of many more.²

There was considerable uncertainty, then, about the exact

¹ See Euler to Westein, 10 Dec. 1746, *Philosophical Transactions*, no. 482, p. 422; Dobbs to Westein, 10 Feb. 1747, *ibid.*, no. 483, pp. 471-6; Harris (revised Campbell), *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, II, pp. 1024-41. A summary of the various arguments was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX (June 1749), pp. 255-8.

² Harris (revised Campbell), *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, II, p. 1028.

nature of the discoveries made on both Bering's expeditions. On his first he had neither proved conclusively that Asia and America were separated, nor discovered (if they were, as most geographers were now willing to accept) by what extent. Fifty years later widely divergent views were still being expressed on this subject, and although one compiler echoed a widely held opinion when he quoted the geographer Büsching as stating that the two continents were only separated by 'a very narrow channel',¹ the revised map of the Russian explorations issued in 1773 by the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences showed Bering Strait more than three hundred miles wide. Not until Cook's third voyage was this point finally settled. The discoveries of Bering's second expedition were even more open to question. After his explorations, and those of Spanberg, the fabulous countries of Yedso, Gama Land and Company Land disappeared from most maps, but there was little unanimity about the significance of the landfalls made by Bering and Chirikov. Between the extremes represented by the map published by the Academy of Sciences in 1758,² with its suggestion of an immense southwestern extension of the tip of the North American continent towards Kamchatka, and the conviction of Dobbs and Campbell that the Russians had sighted only islands, lay many possibilities. This confusion was now increased by the arrival on the scene of the French geographical theorists.

Although Guillaume de l'Isle was long since dead, other members of his family had gained considerable repute as geographers. His younger brothers, Joseph Nicholas de l'Isle and Louis de la Croyère, had both lived for many years in Russia. Joseph Nicholas had played an important part in planning the second Bering expedition, and de la Croyère sailed with Chirikov, but died on the voyage. In 1747 Joseph Nicholas returned to France after twenty-one years at the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, and

¹ *The Modern Part of the Universal History*, XIII (London, 1763), p. 54.

² G. Müller, *Nouvelles Cartes des Découvertes faites par des Vaisseaux Russiens aux Cotes inconnues de l'Amérique avec les pays adjacents*. The revised map published by the Academy in 1773 bore the same title.

shared his information about the Russian discoveries with Philippe Buache, the son-in-law of Guillaume de l'Isle. In April 1750 de l'Isle read a paper on the Russian explorations before the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris, and presented it with a manuscript map drawn by Buache to illustrate the memoir. France in the eighteenth century was the centre of scientific cartography just as Holland had been in the previous century, and Britain was to be in the next; and the publication two years later of the memoir and map marked the beginning of a controversy which exercised a bizarre but important influence upon the course of exploration along the Pacific coast of North America, and the search for the Northwest Passage.¹

In his memoir de l'Isle dealt first with the Bering discoveries of 1728, and stated that the explorer had told him that while he was coasting along the eastern tip of Asia he had every indication of another land not far across the water to the east. De l'Isle then examined the expedition of 1741, and asserted that soon after Bering's ship left Kamchatka it was wrecked upon an island, where Bering died. Having disposed of the commander of the expedition in this cavalier fashion, the geographer turned to the exploits of his own brother in Chirikov's ship. He described how the vessel sailed across the Pacific to the coast of North America, and he dwelt at length on the subsequent hardships suffered by the crew. The gist of this information about Chirikov's discoveries was already well known to European geographers, and the most novel part of the memoir was the examination by de l'Isle of the Fonte letter. He claimed that a manuscript copy of the letter was sent to him from England in 1739, and that when he compared it with the recent Russian discoveries he found 'une si grande conformité que cela nous a surpris'.² To illustrate this alleged similarity de l'Isle included in his memoir a French translation of the letter, and on Buache's

¹ The memoir was published in Paris in 1752 with the title *Explication de la Carte des Nouvelles Découvertes au Nord de la Mer du Sud*. A summary of the memoir was printed in *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences. Année MDCCCL* (Paris, 1754).

² De l'Isle, *Explication*, p. 10.

accompanying map Northwest America was shown penetrated by the great inland seas, straits and rivers said to have been discovered by Fonte in 1640.

It is doubtful whether de l'Isle saw a copy of the Fonte letter as early as 1739; he probably obtained his knowledge of it from later English publications. Certainly, Dobbs was the first to make any mention in print of the letter when he included a slightly abridged copy of it in his 1744 *Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay*. Dobbs took up a different position from later theorists in that he claimed that the lands and waterways described in the Fonte letter were not part of the American continent at all. He was convinced that the Pacific coast of North America trended northeast above California, and that the passage from Hudson Bay to the South Sea lay between the continent and the lands discovered by Fonte.¹ Five years later, Drage printed in the second volume of his account of the Moor expedition to Hudson Bay an examination of the Fonte letter, and a map of the admiral's discoveries, which he strove to relate to those attributed to Juan de Fuca. He noted certain similarities between the narratives of Fuca and Fonte, and concluded that they described the same stretch of coast, shrugging aside the difference in latitude between Fuca's entrance and Fonte's Río los Reyes as being 'of little Consequence'.²

This was the situation when de l'Isle read his memoir before the Académie Royale des Sciences in 1750. The Fonte and Fuca accounts were both known, and a certain amount had been written about them in the preceding decade; but they had undergone no detailed investigation, nor had any comprehensive attempt been made to map the northwest coast of America in accordance with the information given in them. Until 1750 the two accounts had made little impact on geographers and cartographers. But in June 1752 de l'Isle's memoir and Buache's map were published in Paris; and criticism was not long delayed. First reaction came from Russia, where Professor Müller of the

¹ Dobbs, *Account of Hudson's Bay*, pp. 123-30.

² Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, II, pp. 304-28.

St Petersburg Academy of Sciences was instructed by the President of the Academy to publish a denial of de l'Isle's 'evil representations' about the second Bering expedition.¹ Müller, who had been connected with the expedition, and wrote his reply to de l'Isle under the pseudonym of 'un Officier de la Marine Russien', stressed that Bering had completed his explorations before being shipwrecked, and had sighted the American coast. He also dealt in severe fashion with the Fonte letter, and pointed out several inconsistencies in the account, which he thought 'calculated only for amusement'.

Müller's brief comments of 1753 were followed five years later by the publication of his great work, *Sammlung Russische Geschichte*, the third volume of which was translated into English and published by Thomas Jefferys in 1761. Müller's book was the most important contemporary account of the Russian discoveries, and it furnished a readable, coherent and generally accurate description of the Bering expeditions. He admitted that Bering on his first expedition had not brought back the conclusive information expected, but correctly insisted that the Dane's explorations, and those of Gwosdev in 1732, had shown 'that there is a real separation between the two parts of the world, Asia, and America; that it consists only in a narrow streight'.² His account of the second expedition described the explorations of Bering's two ships and the host of minor explorers connected with the project. He pointed out that the Russian explorations had diminished the chances of finding a passage through Hudson Bay because they seemed to show that the American coast extended northwest as far as Bering Strait. Müller was the more emphatic on this point since he rejected the system of inland seas and straits shown by de l'Isle and Buache along the Pacific coast of North America, and mildly censured their cartographic absurdities: 'It is always much better to omit

¹ See L. Breitfuss, 'Early Maps of North-Eastern Asia and of the Lands around the North Pacific', *Imago Mundi*, III (London, 1939), pp. 87-99.

² G. Müller, *Voyages from Asia to America, for Completing the Discoveries of the North West Coast of America* (London, 1764, 2nd edn.), p. 28.

whatever is uncertain, and leave a void space, till future discoveries shall ascertain the affair in dispute'.¹

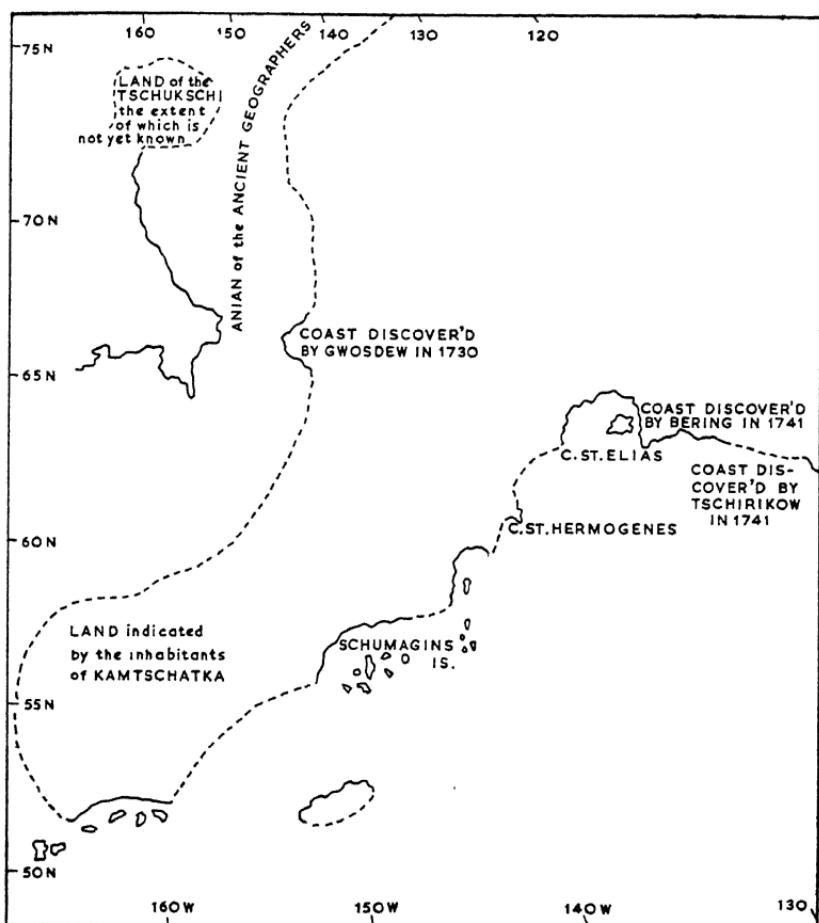
Müller's own map of the Russian discoveries, first constructed in 1754, was published by the Academy of Sciences at the same time as his book, and was included in the English edition of the third volume. The map illustrated the official Russian view that not only was the land first sighted by Bering and Chirikov part of the North American continent, but that most of the coastline glimpsed on the return voyage also belonged to the mainland, as did the land seen by Gwosdev in 1732 opposite the eastern tip of Asia. This conviction led to the bloated Alaskan peninsula of the map, which was copied by many cartographers until the explorations of Cook reduced it to correct proportions. Müller warned against placing too much trust in the accuracy of the map—'My work herein has been no more than to connect together, according to probability, by points, the coasts that had been seen in various places'²—yet the resultant product remained for fifteen years a standard map of the region, for there were many who preferred Müller's tentative outlines to the detailed but fanciful maps of the theoretical geographers.

Although Müller indicated his general disapproval of maps based on the Fonte account, he did not examine them in detail, and the most thorough of the early criticisms of the theories of de l'Isle and Buache came from a British geographer, John Green, whose *New Chart of North and South America* was published in 1753, together with an accompanying volume of *Remarks*.³ The map and memoir brought Green's work to the attention of European geographers, who recognized in him a cartographer of perception and integrity (qualities by no means common among British mapmakers at this time). Green condemned the Fuca and Fonte accounts as 'palpable forgeries', and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³ For details of Green's identity and career see two articles by G. R. Crone: 'John Green. Notes on a neglected Eighteenth Century Geographer and Cartographer', *Imago Mundi*, VI (Stockholm, 1949), pp. 85–91; 'Further Notes on Bradock Mead, alias John Green, an eighteenth century cartographer', *ibid.*, VIII (Stockholm, 1951), pp. 69–70.

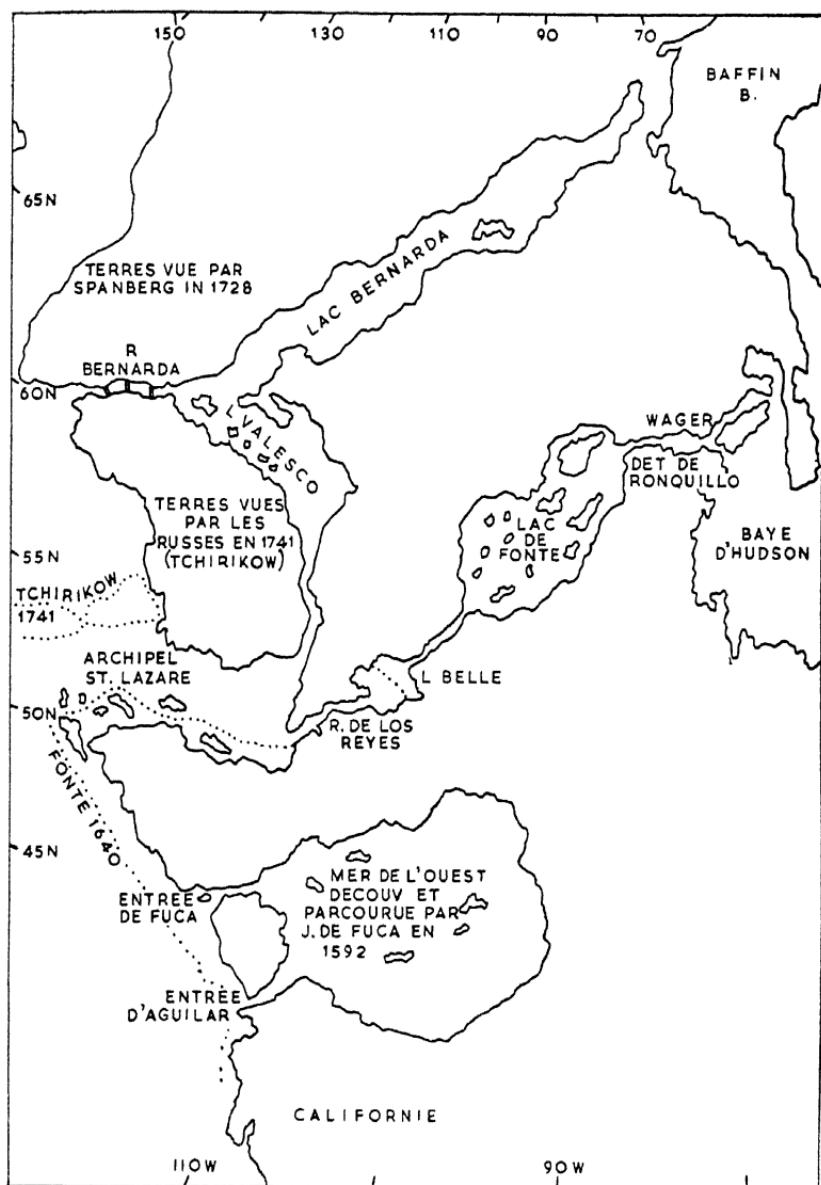


Alaska and Bering Strait: after G. Müller 1758

maintained that the publicity being given to the Fonte letter was intended to divert the British from seeking a passage by the more probable route along the northern coastline of America, or across the pole. He criticized the efforts made by Dobbs and Drage to explain the letter, but reserved his most severe censure for the map published under Buache's name in June 1752. In the introduction to his *Remarks* Green had freely admitted the superiority of French cartography, which at this time owed

much to scholars with keen critical faculties as well as to excellent technicians, and was astonished that de l'Isle and Buache should accept a narrative so patently spurious as the Fonte letter. Above all, this painstaking geographer was staggered by his discovery that de l'Isle and Buache, having apparently accepted the Fonte letter as genuine, did not in fact follow the information given in it. The most serious difference was that whereas the letter stated that the entrance of the Río los Reyes lay in latitude 53° N., it was shown without comment or explanation on the Buache map in latitude 63° N. Since this river marked the beginning of Fonte's inland discoveries, most other features on the map were also placed too far north. It was this discrepancy which led to the publication in September 1752 of a second map of the Fonte discoveries with the Río los Reyes placed correctly (according to the Fonte letter) in latitude 53° N. The map was constructed by de l'Isle, who sent a copy to the Royal Society with the limp explanation that the June map contained a ten degree error because Buache had departed from his instructions.

The next year de l'Isle issued an atlas, *Nouvelles Cartes des Découvertes de l'Amiral de Fonte*, while Buache, perhaps smarting at de l'Isle's accusation that he had been unable to follow orders in constructing the map of June 1752, produced an impressive volume entitled *Considerations Géographiques et Physiques sur les Nouvelles Découvertes au Nord de la Grande Mer*. This work, with its thirteen maps, contained an exhaustive commentary on the Fonte letter. The Río los Reyes was once again shown in latitude 63° N., and Buache emphasized that this was a deliberate departure from the text of the Fonte letter. The book was an example of theoretical geography at its most complex, comprehensive and fantastic. Accounts of voyages, some genuine, some apocryphal; reports and rumours, French, English, Spanish, Russian, even Chinese: all were accepted by Buache and welded together in the construction of his fanciful system. Its most important feature as far as the English quest for the Northwest Passage was concerned was Buache's argu-



Northwest America: after J. N. de l'Isle 1752

ment that the high tides in Hudson Bay flowed from the Pacific not through Fonte's waterways, but farther south through the 'Mer de l'Ouest' and the 'Grande Eau' which the Indians had described. This met the objection put forward by some critics that the Pacific tide could not pass the eight cataracts across Lake Belle described in the Fonte letter, and showed that Buache, like de l'Isle, considered that there was a continuous salt-water strait between Hudson Bay and the Pacific.

Where de l'Isle and Buache led, others followed. R. J. Julien was evidently attracted either by the plausibility or the novelty of de l'Isle's map of September 1752, and his representation of Northwest America on the *Nouvelle Mappe Monde* he issued in 1753 followed it closely. Other French cartographers who accepted the systems of de l'Isle and Buache were Jean Janvier and Louis Denis; but the new publications of the two French geographers also provoked a further spate of comment and criticism, including a memoir by Dobbs published in 1754, the year he departed for North Carolina.¹ Characteristically, Dobbs considered that Buache's motive in placing Fonte's route ten degrees farther north than usual, that is, near frozen Baffin Bay rather than Hudson Bay, sprang from a desire to discourage English attempts to discover the Northwest Passage.

Nor were the maps of de l'Isle and Buache criticized only outside France. Two of the best-known French geographers, de Vaugondy and Bellin, expressed doubts about the system of imaginary geography centred around the Fonte letter, and the former praised Green's refusal to accept the letter as authentic, even though it was first published in England. 'Le jugement que le sçavant Anglois en porte, ne fait que confirmer ce que d'autres en ont pensé.'² In the preface to his *Atlas Universel* of 1757 de Vaugondy detailed the various circumstances which made the Fonte account too unreliable to be used by cartographers, and on his map of North America in the atlas he prudently marked

¹ *Observations on the Russian Discoveries, etc. by Governor Dobbs* (London, 1754).

² Robert de Vaugondy, *Essai sur l'Histoire de la Géographie* (Paris, 1755), p. 179.

nothing north of an entrance in the northwest coast in latitude 43° N. claimed to have been discovered in 1603 by a Spanish lieutenant, Aguilar. His general views on the possibility of a Northwest Passage were less definite, and he was content to hint darkly that 'sur cela l'on a déjà quelques soupçons'.¹

Bellin was particularly well placed to judge the reliability of the new maps, because his position as Ingénieur de la Marine et du Dépôt des Cartes, Plans et Journaux gave him access to the reports and maps of La Vérendrye and other French explorers in North America. As beffitted his official status, he showed little patience with cartographers who produced maps to fit theories, and he preferred to leave a region blank rather than fill it with doubtful detail. He was sceptical of Buache's insistence that the 'Mer de l'Ouest' was a great inland sea, and placed little trust in the Fonte letter, which he thought was perhaps an account concocted in England to stimulate interest in the Northwest Passage.² Just as nationalistic British geographers decried attempts to find a waterway to the Pacific other than through Hudson Bay, so Bellin in turn rejected their theories and favoured, as he had in 1744, La Vérendrye's proposed route to the ocean along a string of lakes and rivers west of Lake Superior.

Nowhere was the controversy over the Fonte discoveries followed with more interest than in England, where gradual acceptance of the fact that the northwest coast of America extended, in some shape or fashion, almost as far as Kamchatka, lent additional importance to the vast inland sea and network of straits and rivers shown on the maps of de l'Isle and Buache. The maps and books of the French geographers reached England soon after publication, and advertisements in the newspapers of this period show that London sellers of maps and prints normally stocked both the standard and latest foreign maps.³ Often

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

² J. N. Bellin, *Remarques sur la Carte de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris, 1755), p. 74n.

³ E.g. in March and May 1748 the following advertisements were inserted in *The General Advertiser* by Overton, the Fleet Street mapseller:

23 March. 'Just arrived from Holland the following Foreign Maps; Several

it was possible to obtain folios and atlases direct from the continent at the time of publication, and the list of subscribers given in the opening pages of successive editions of de Vaugondy's great *Atlas Universel* included the names of English scholars and librarians. At times the competition between publishers of rival maps became intense. In March 1749, for example, English newspapers carried an advertisement with details of a subscription for d'Anville's map of North America; three days later another publisher inserted an advertisement drawing attention to the fact 'That there is already Mr. Popple's Large and Curious Map of North-America . . . being the largest and finest executed Map in the World'.¹ Within a month of the publication in Paris of the first Buache map in June 1752 information about it appeared in English newspapers:

The Sieurs de Lisle and Buache have presented to the King [of France] a Chart of Mr. Lisle's late Discoveries to the Northward of the South Sea, containing all the Space hitherto unknown, betwixt North America and the Eastern Extremity of Asia; a Performance, certainly of as great Importance as any which Geography has for a long Time afforded, both by the vast Extent of Seas and Lands it exhibits, and the Insight for a shorter Cut to the East Indies.²

Copies of the map were eagerly awaited in England, where at the beginning of 1753 Peter Collinson, London merchant and Fellow of the Royal Society, wrote to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia describing reports of the new French map which showed 'a River from about Hudsons bay Derived from a Great Island lake full of Islands and another river falling from that lake into the Eastern Ocean above California'.³ That year the

Atlas's of 110, 118 and 132 Maps, by the celebrated Mons. D'Lisle, First Geographer to the present King of France.'

16 May. 'Just Imported from Amsterdam, A Large Parcel of Foreign Maps done by the Royal Academy at Paris, also by Mons. De Lisle, Sanson . . . and other celebrated Geographers.'

¹ *The General Advertiser*, 23 March, 26 March 1749.

² *London Daily Advertiser*, 16 July 1752.

³ See Bertha Solis-Cohen, 'Philadelphia's Expeditions to Labrador', *Pennsylvania History*, XIX (1952), p. 159. Franklin himself believed that the Fonte letter was genuine, although 'an abridgement and a translation, and bad in

first copies reached England, and in 1754 translations of de l'Isle's original memoir and Müller's *Lettre d'un Officier de la Marine Russien* were published in London, while a reproduction of the de l'Isle map of September 1752, and a long summary of the controversy about the Fonte account, appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*.¹

During the 1750s, then, no expedition left England to seek the Northwest Passage, but those years saw a growing interest in the Pacific coastline of North America, and the emergence of theories which had much to do with the fact that when the quest for a passage was renewed it was to the distant waters of the north Pacific that the British government sent its discovery ships. The scholars of one nation, however, seemed to hold aloof from the debate on the Fonte letter. To the geographers of Europe, accustomed to the silence of the Spanish government about its overseas ventures and possessions, there appeared nothing remarkable about the fact that no scholar from Spain, the country whose archives clearly held the answer to all questions about the Fonte voyage, came forward to make any authoritative pronouncement on the exploits of the Spanish admiral. To most the suspicious reluctance of the Spaniards to comment on the letter of 1708 was additional proof of its authenticity. Yet in Spain was working a Jesuit who produced definite proof that the Fonte account was false; and it was the act, not of a Spaniard, but of an English publisher, which withheld this evidence from the rest of Europe.

In 1757 a three-volume work, *Noticia de la California* by Padre Andrés Marcos Burriel, was published in Madrid.² The first two volumes contained a history and description of California, and formed a valuable and informative commentary on

both respects; if a fiction it is plainly not an English one, but it has none of the features of fiction'. Extract of letter from Franklin to Dr (later Sir) John Pringle, 27 May 1762, printed in *Notes and Queries*, 4th Series, IV, 13 Nov. 1869, pp. 406-7.

¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XXIV (March, April 1754), pp. 123-8, 166-7.

² The book was nominally the work of Padre Miguel Venegas; for a discussion of its authorship see C. E. Chapman, *The Founding of Spanish California. The Northwestward Expansion of New Spain 1687-1783* (New York, 1916), p. 56.

that part of the Spanish colonial empire. The third volume consisted of a series of appendices, two of which bore on the question of the Northwest Passage. Appendix VI was an account of English voyages to discover a passage, in which Henry Ellis received some pointed criticism as a characteristic English theorist, while in the one hundred and fifty pages of Appendix VII Burriel made an intensive study of the Fonte account and the system of theoretical geography erected by de l'Isle and Buache. He detailed various discrepancies between the account and Buache's map, and pointed out absurdities in the account which, if taken literally, meant that Fonte and his officers had covered hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles of the North American continent in a few days. But the main value of Burriel's work lay not so much in this criticism, which could have been carried out by any competent geographer (and Green in fact had covered much of the same ground in 1753), as in his examination of those Spanish archives and libraries where mention of Fonte or his expedition might be expected. The archives of the Council of the Indies, contemporary published accounts and maps, the naval records at Madrid, Seville, and Cadiz: all had been examined in vain. In none could Burriel find any reference to the voyage of 1640, or to an admiral called Fonte.¹

Burriel's careful search in the Spanish archives should have put an end to speculation about the authenticity of the Fonte letter, but when a two-volume English translation of his work was published in 1759, appendices VI and VII were not included. No indication of this omission (which was the only serious departure from the original, and was repeated in the French and Dutch editions since they were both translated from the English) was given by the editor; and his stress upon the importance to British trade and navigation of theories about the geography of Northwest America, and his insistence that Burriel's work showed that the discovery of a passage was 'a very probable

¹ [Burriel], *Noticia*, III, p. 355. For a more detailed description of Burriel's work see my article, 'An Eighteenth-Century Spanish Investigation into the Apocryphal Voyage of Admiral Fonte', *Pacific Historical Review*, XXX (1961), pp. 319-27.

thing',¹ makes it unlikely that the two important appendices dealing with the passage and the Fonte letter were left out for reasons of space or economy. Partly because of this omission the Fonte account remained to bedevil geographers and explorers for another forty years, and the effect that the apparent silence of the Spanish historian had on English theorists was illustrated by a book published in 1768, *The Great Probability of a North West Passage: Deduced from Observations on the Letter of Admiral De Fonte*. The author was probably Captain Charles Swaine, a seaman who had commanded discovery expeditions on the Labrador coast, and had been commissioned by Benjamin Franklin in 1752 to make enquiries in New England about the Boston ship and men described in the Fonte letter.² Swaine, who had read Burriel's work only in its English edition, criticized the Spaniard for not mentioning the Fonte narrative which, Swaine concluded, Burriel 'desired to suppress . . . as it was an Account which he knew it was more consistent with the Designs of the Court, it should be continued in Oblivion than revived'.³ He refused to believe that the letter was a forgery, and thought it was a careless and badly printed translation of a Spanish document which had come into the possession of the editors of the *Memoirs for the Curious* in 1708. Swaine went on to examine the letter with devout care, and gave such additional information as he considered elucidated or confirmed the narrative.

Swaine's undistinguished monograph made no great impression at the time of its publication. The Fonte letter had been the inexhaustible source of so many differing theories that it was clear that only exploration of the northwest coast of America could determine if any of them were correct. Until then further speculation was useless, and the opinion of one reviewer of the book at this time probably represented the conviction of all but a handful of geographers: 'The conclusions drawn from this

¹ *A Natural and Civil History of California* (London, 1759), I, preface.

² See Solis-Cohen, 'Expeditions to Labrador', *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, p. 154; 'Bibliographical Notes', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, XXXIX (1945), pp. 319-20.

³ [Swaine], *Great Probability of a North West Passage*, p. 92.

kind of evidence are nevertheless but presumptive at best, and a north-west passage remains still problematical, for accident or future trial to determine'.¹ But that the writer should admit that the question of the Northwest Passage was still not settled, testifies to the latent optimism in England that a passage might yet be found. This hope would persist as long as the smallest stretch of coastline remained unexplored, for belief in the existence of a passage was deep-rooted, and in the eyes of some patriotic geographers and economists was elevated almost to the status of a law of nature. The believers might be small in number, and no longer able to tempt private adventurers to finance expeditions of exploration; but they were influential enough to turn the attention of the Admiralty to the possibility of discovering a passage, and the 'future trial' envisaged by the anonymous reviewer of 1768 was not to be long delayed.

¹ *The Monthly Review*, XXXIX (Sept. 1768), p. 241.

The Admiralty and the Pacific Approach

SINCE James Knight sailed from Gravesend in 1719 to seek the Strait of Anian, disillusionment and death had been the lot of the Hudson Bay explorers; but in the same year that Moses Norton wrote emphatically from Churchill, 'I am Certain and Shure that there is no Pasage into the Western Ocan in this Hudsons Bay',¹ a naval expedition slipped quietly out from Plymouth with secret instructions to find the Pacific entrance of the Northwest Passage. The orders given to Commodore John Byron in 1764 were a sign that the Admiralty, more than twenty years after the Middleton expedition, was again preparing to take up the quest. No more private expeditions left England this century in search of the passage, and only one further attempt was made by the Hudson's Bay Company: from this time forward it was the Admiralty which bore, somewhat reluctantly on occasion, the main responsibility for discovering the passage.

The change in control was inevitably accompanied by a change in emphasis, because the Admiralty's direction of the search was closely linked with considerations of national policy. In Britain the temper of the age was at last favourably disposed towards projects of discovery and expansion. Although in 1763 overseas possessions of unprecedented extent had been added to the British crown, and a period of assimilation and absorption might have been expected, the energies revealed and released in the Seven Years War sought new outlets, and the scene in every direction was one of hustling activity. This activity was nowhere more marked than in the surge of maritime exploration in the years after the Treaty of Paris, when British ships competed

¹ Norton to Committee, 24 Aug. 1764. HBC A 11/14, f. 3v.
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with expeditions from France, Spain and Russia in exploring the vast unknown spaces of the Pacific.¹ With European interest in the Pacific rapidly increasing, the Northwest Passage was regarded with a new interest at the very time when the evidence of the old Spanish accounts, and the continuing Russian explorations, held out fresh hope that it might be found, and when advances in navigational science and naval hygiene made it possible for expeditions to be sent to the distant northwest coast of America. But other projects of oceanic discovery also engaged the attention of statesmen, geographers and economists; and whereas in the first half of the century the expeditions which left England to seek the Northwest Passage represented virtually the only serious attempts at maritime exploration, in the period after 1763 the discovery of a passage was merely one of a number of objectives that the government sought to attain.

Some of the strategic and commercial aims that influenced naval exploration during the years of uneasy peace after the Treaty of Paris were disclosed in the Admiralty's instructions to Byron before he sailed in 1764 on the first discovery voyage of the new reign. Byron, who had sailed in the ill-fated *Wager* with Anson a quarter of a century earlier, was ordered to explore certain dimly-known lands in the south Atlantic, and in particular the Falkland Islands, which were considered to occupy so dominant a position near the southern entrance into the Pacific through the Strait of Magellan that Lord Egmont at the Admiralty described them as 'the key to the whole Pacific Ocean'.² After completing this part of his task, Byron was to sail to New Albion on the northwest coast of America, discovered and named by Drake in 1579. That region, Byron was informed, 'has never been examined with that care which it deserves, notwithstanding

¹ For details of these explorations see E. Heawood, *A History of Geographical Discovery in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1912); J. A. Williamson, 'Exploration and Discovery', in A. S. Turberville (ed.), *Johnson's England* (Oxford, 1933), I, Ch. V; J. C. Beaglehole, *Exploration of the Pacific* (2nd edn., London, 1947).

² Egmont to Grafton, 20 July 1765. Quoted in Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793*, I (London, 1952), p. 28.

ing frequent recommendations of that undertaking by the said Sir Fran^s Drake, Dampier and many other mariners of great Experience, who have thought it probable that a passage might be found between the latitude of 38° and 54° from that coast into Hudson's Bay'.¹ Byron was to examine the coast north of Drake's landing place in latitude 38° N., and if he found a passage into Hudson Bay return through it to England. The project was one to tax the resources of a more determined explorer than the aristocratic Byron who, even before he had struggled through the Strait of Magellan, wrote to Egmont, 'Our ships are too much disabled for the California Voyage.'² He returned across the Pacific to England in record time, but made few discoveries of consequence, and perhaps the chief interest of his voyage lies in the ambitious nature of the programme he was expected to carry out.

The design revealed in the instructions of 1764 was far from new. In the reign of Elizabeth, Sir Richard Grenville had planned an expedition which was to fortify the Strait of Magellan and then pass into the Pacific, find the Strait of Anian, and sail through it into the Atlantic.³ Grenville's expedition was still-born, and it was Drake, more interested in plunder than exploration, who sailed on the track proposed by his fellow Devonian. He reached the coast of New Albion (as he named the region north of California) and stayed there some time, but there is little evidence that he seriously considered returning by way of a northern passage.⁴ Nor were there any further attempts to carry out Grenville's scheme. With the consolidation of Spanish power in South and Central America, and the growth in number and importance of the English settlements on the Atlantic seaboard of North America, the Pacific was neglected by

¹ Admiralty to Byron, 17 June 1764. Adm 2/1332, pp. 99–100.

² Byron to Egmont, 24 Feb. 1765. S.P. For. 94/253, f. 236v.

³ See A. L. Rowse, *Sir Richard Grenville* (London, 1937), pp. 102–5.

⁴ A summary of such evidence as there is, is contained in two articles by E. G. R. Taylor: 'Master John Dee, Drake and the Straits of Anian', *The Mariner's Mirror*, XV (1929), pp. 125–30; 'More Light on Drake: 1577–80', *ibid.*, XVI (1930), pp. 134–51. But see also H. R. Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage around the World* (San Francisco, 1926), pp. 21, 130, 459–60.

the English except for the occasional forays of privateers. Serious exploration for a northern sea route into the Pacific was confined to the northeast shores of the continent, and only after failure in that region were suggestions again put forward that an attempt should be made from the Pacific side. In 1669 Sir John Narborough sailed for the northwest coast of America in search of a passage, but was turned back by the Spaniards. Then, in 1697, William Dampier argued that exploration north of California, rather than in ice-bound Hudson Bay, was the most practical way of finding the passage;¹ and after the difficulties experienced by the discovery expeditions sent to the Bay in the first half of the eighteenth century his proposals were hesitantly revived. There are indications that in 1749 Henry Ellis tried to persuade the Admiralty to send an expedition to the northwest coast of America, and shortly before the outbreak of the Seven Years War Anson (then First Lord of the Admiralty) appears to have been considering a plan to send two naval discovery vessels to the north Pacific.²

The maps based on the discoveries alleged to have been made by Fuca and Fonte along the northwest coast of America seemed to provide powerful reinforcement of the arguments of Dampier and others, and the influence on the Admiralty of the theories of de l'Isle and his fellow cartographers was perhaps greater at the time of the Byron expedition than has previously been acknowledged. Although many distrusted the works of the speculative geographers, their importance in determining the course of eighteenth-century exploration should not be underestimated. The members of the Board of Admiralty responsible for directing the explorations of Cook and Wallis in the southern hemisphere were clearly influenced by the insistence of Dalrymple and Campbell that a great southern continent existed; and similarly there is every likelihood that before drawing up Byron's instructions the Board had studied, however sceptically, the ac-

¹ See John Masefield (ed.), *The Voyages of Captain William Dampier* (London, 1906), I, pp. 287-8.

² See letter Cramond to Scott, 24 Dec. 1772, in Dartmouth MSS., D 1778, V 284.

counts of the Fuca and Fonte discoveries. There were, indeed, no other accounts it could examine, and it is significant that along the stretch of coastline Byron was ordered to explore were situated the entrances of the three rivers or straits thought to have been discovered by Aguilar, Fuca and Fonte. The farthest north of these openings, Fonte's Río los Reyes, lay in latitude 53° N.; Byron was ordered to explore as far north as latitude 54° N.

The time, then, was propitious for a diversion in the search for the Northwest Passage from the east to the west coast of America, inasmuch as the revival of British ambitions in the South Sea coincided with the growing conviction of those who still believed in the existence of a northern strait that its Pacific entrance would be easier to find than its opening into the ice-choked bays of the North Atlantic. Easier it might be from the point of navigation, but whereas expeditions to Hudson Bay had carried out their explorations undisturbed except for the fretfulness of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Pacific approach presented formidable diplomatic problems. To Spain, desperately seeking to preserve its colonial monopoly, the Pacific was *mare clausum*, and foreign incursions into its waters were viewed with concern and indignation. British activities were regarded with particular suspicion; since the sixteenth century Spaniards had feared a surprise attack from raiders by way of that northern passage which the British were so determined to discover. Burriel reflected this recurrent Spanish anxiety when he saw ominous storm-warnings in Anson's expedition, and pointed out that if the British found a passage they would not only be able to raid the territories of Spanish America at will, but would dominate the South Sea and its commerce.¹ Byron's expedition was regarded as a threatening portent, and on its return the Spanish ambassador in London, the Prince de Masserano, persistently questioned ministers about its objectives. In one dispatch to Madrid he reported, erroneously, that Byron had gone as far as New Albion, but had not been able to find a passage into Hudson

¹ [Burriel], *Noticia de la California*, III, p. 235.

Bay. In another he reported a conversation with the Duke of Richmond, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, in the course of which he had bluntly summed up Spanish policy towards foreign intrusions into the South Sea. Richmond, after blandly informing the anxious ambassador that the expedition 'had been out looking for giants', had eventually disclaimed all knowledge of Byron's intentions in the Pacific. 'To which', wrote Masserano, 'I said that was a point about which I felt and ought to feel more curiosity, since all those countries are the King's and no one may settle in them. He asked me if the whole world was Spain's; and I replied that, as to that portion yes.'¹

But Spanish attempts at discouragement failed to prevent the systematic penetration of the Pacific by British naval expeditions, and Byron's ships were followed by those of Wallis, Carteret and Cook. Attention at this time was centred on the south Pacific and Atlantic; on the Falkland Islands, and the great continent thought to exist south of latitude 40° S. The establishment of a British base at Port Egmont in the Falklands brought Britain and Spain close to war, but in 1774 the government abandoned its post there, although it was careful to leave the British flag flying as an indication that it had not given up claims of possession. That same year, Cook, far distant in Antarctic latitudes, was discovering that the geographers' vision of a rich and verdant continent in the south Pacific was without substance.

Even before these disappointments in the southern hemisphere there were signs in Britain of increasing interest in exploration in a different direction; to the north. Since the end of 1772 a group of enthusiasts, whose numbers included Valtravers, Palatine agent in London to the East India Company, Cramond, a retired merchant who had travelled and traded in Persia and Russia, and the Swiss geographer Engel, had been harrying members of the government with memoirs and letters about the

¹ The text of these dispatches is given in B. G. Corney (ed.), *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain in 1772-1776* (London, The Hakluyt Society, 1913-19), I, pp. 23-30.

Northeast Passage.¹ The arguments they put forward were much the same as those advanced in favour of action to discover the Northwest Passage: the possibility of establishing British trading posts in the north Pacific, the glory that the discovery would bring Britain, the increase of geographical knowledge, and the danger that the French might find the passage first. But the response of busy ministers was lukewarm, and it is among the members of the Royal Society that we must look for the formation of an effective pressure group to advocate the cause of northern discovery. The Society had a long tradition of interest in voyages and travels, and its influence at the Admiralty had recently been demonstrated by the sending to the Pacific of Cook's first expedition (the primary objective of which was the establishment of an astronomical station at Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus in 1769). President of the Society was Sir John Pringle, famed for his medical researches, but also keenly interested in questions of exploration. He was friendly with Cook, and had corresponded with Benjamin Franklin about the Fonte letter, and sent him the unpublished observations of the Hudson's Bay Company captain William Coats on the Northwest Passage.² Of the other members of the Royal Society who shared the fashionable enthusiasm for maritime discovery, one stood out in zeal and devotion: Daines Barrington, jurist, antiquarian, naturalist, geographer, and a member of the Council of the Society.

One of Barrington's correspondents was Samuel Engel, who was convinced that the north polar sea was free from ice. His interest in the subject was conveyed to Barrington, who proceeded to carry out enthusiastic, if somewhat uncritical, investigations into the question of polar navigation, and whether ships could sail across the pole, and so into the Pacific through

¹ Some of this correspondence is to be found in Dartmouth MSS., D 1778, V 284-8. Lord Dartmouth was Secretary of State for the American Colonies from 1772 to 1775. The letters show that Lord Sandwich at the Admiralty, and even on occasion Lord North, had also been approached.

² See Minis Hays (ed.), *Calendar of the Papers of Benjamin Franklin in the Library of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia, 1908), III, p. 468.

Bering Strait. The idea of sailing to the East Indies by way of the pole had been suggested as early as the reign of Henry VIII, and in the seventeenth century several expeditions had been sent north to test the theory, but ice had prevented them sailing beyond latitude 80° N. There the matter rested until 1765 when Engel published his *Mémoires et Observations Géographiques et Critiques*, in which he argued that most of the ice encountered in high northern latitudes came from the rivers when they broke up in the early summer, and that it was, consequently, only thick near land. Barrington, in a series of tracts published in 1775 and 1776, buttressed this theory with assiduously gathered examples of whalers and other vessels that were alleged to have found an ice-free sea near the North Pole. The long list was impressive only to those who preferred to count rather than weigh authorities; nevertheless, whatever his lack of critical faculties, Barrington formed in his capacity as a Council member of the Royal Society and a friend of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich, a vital link between the Society and the Admiralty.

The importance of this link is revealed by the Society records, which show that early in 1773 Barrington raised the question of polar navigation at a Council meeting, and stated that he had already discussed the matter with Lord Sandwich.¹ Sandwich had evidently shown interest in Barrington's theories, and Dr Maty, Secretary of the Royal Society, wrote to him on behalf of the President and Council suggesting that a naval expedition should be sent to search for a passage to the East Indies by way of the North Pole. Such an expedition, Maty pointed out, would be 'of service to the promotion of Natural knowledge, the proper object of their [the Society's] institution';² and it was this aspect of the voyages of exploration that the Royal Society felt to be its particular concern. First reaction at the Admiralty was that there could be no expedition in 1773 because provision for the cost had not been made in that year's supply, but second

¹ Council Minutes, 19 Jan. 1773. Archives of the Royal Society, VI, p. 160.

² Maty to Admiralty, 19 Jan. 1773. *Ibid.*

thoughts prevailed, and in February it was decided to send two sloops on an expedition towards the pole. The vessels were hurriedly strengthened, double bottoms fitted, their bows fortified, and other alterations made to adapt them for work among ice. Greenland pilots were engaged to offset the lack of Arctic experience among regular naval officers, and at the beginning of June the expedition sailed under the command of Captain John Phipps (himself a Council member of the Royal Society), who was ordered to spend the summer investigating how far north he could sail, since 'there is great probability that navigation is practicable nearer the North Pole than has been ascertained and that by, or near it, a passage to the East Indies may be found'.¹ Barrington at this time was still collecting reports describing the ease with which whalers had reached high northern latitudes, but Phipps could not penetrate the ice-barrier which he found north of Spitzbergen in latitude 80° N., and it was only with difficulty that he extricated his battered vessels from the grip of the ice and limped back to England.

The attempt to find a passage to the Indies across the pole had almost ended in disaster, and no further effort was made in the eighteenth century to put the theories of Engel and Barrington to practical test. Barrington himself was not greatly impressed by the pessimistic nature of the report brought back by Phipps, because he thought that the position of the ice-barrier changed periodically, and that Phipps had been sent in a 'bad year'.² He continued to press his ideas on polar navigation by the publication of pamphlets and in letters to Sandwich, but he also turned his attention to the possibility of discovering the Northwest Passage, and the route he suggested was that proposed to Byron in 1764; through the Pacific to the northwest coast of America. The tactics Barrington adopted were the same that had proved so effective in 1773. He again introduced the subject to the Council of the Royal Society which, at two meetings in February

¹ Admiralty to Phipps, 25 May 1773. Adm 2/98, p. 304.

² Daines Barrington, *The Probability of Reaching the North Pole Discussed* (London, 1775), p. 13.

1774, discussed and approved his plan.¹ It then communicated its views to the Admiralty; and the resultant letter is a document of considerable importance, for, although not noted by any of Cook's biographers, it contains the genesis of the explorer's final voyage. Maty wrote:

The Council of the Royal Society having last year submitted a proposal to your Lordships, for making discoveries towards the North pole (which was honoured with your approbation), are now emboldened to lay another plan before the Board of Admiralty, for the protection of Science in general, and more particularly that of Geography.

They conceive that a Ship, or Ships, fitted out either in Europe or the East Indies, may be victualled at the Port of Canton in China; from whence the run to the Northern parts of New Albion will not be, probably, longer than from England to Jamaica: such vessels therefore (even if no refreshment could be procured on the Coast of North America) might proceed up the North western side of that continent, so as to discover whether there is a passage into the European Seas . . .²

The Admiralty replied that no provision had been made in that year's estimates for so expensive an undertaking, and that it could not proceed further in the matter;³ but the decision was not final. Sandwich wrote an apologetic letter to Barrington, explaining the attitude of the Board, and asked Barrington to call on him so that they could discuss the subject.⁴ As a statesman and administrator Sandwich may have had defects, but the support he gave projects of exploration during his years at the Admiralty does much to account for the continuing expansion of British interest in the Pacific during this period; and after he

¹ Council Minutes, 10, 17 Feb. 1774. Archives of the Royal Society, VI, pp. 214, 216.

² Maty to Admiralty, 17 Feb. 1774. *Ibid.*, p. 216. The present writer was induced to search for the letter in the Society archives after noting an extract from it in C. R. Weld, *A History of the Royal Society* (London, 1848), II, pp. 73-4. It is an interesting coincidence that a memoir among the Dartmouth MSS. written by John Hanson and dated 17 Jan. 1774 (D 1778 V 286) also contains proposals for an expedition to the northwest coast of America.

³ Admiralty to Royal Society, 7 March 1774. Archives of the Royal Society, Council Minutes, VI, p. 220.

⁴ Sandwich to Barrington, 12 March 1774. Sandwich MSS.

and Barrington had 'a very full conversation' about the proposed expedition, the latter was able to assure the Council of the Royal Society that when Cook returned from the Pacific an expedition would be fitted out to make the discoveries suggested in Maty's letter.¹

Cook was expected back from the Pacific in 1775, and evidence of the government's intention to send an expedition in search of the Northwest Passage is shown by its support that year of a parliamentary bill offering a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of a passage. The bill was a revised version of the 1745 Act, passed at the time of Dobbs' campaign to organize a discovery expedition to Hudson Bay, but differed from it in several significant respects.² The earlier Act had specified that the passage, the discovery of which would be 'of great benefit and advantage to the trade of this kingdom', should lie between the Pacific and Hudson Bay; and it had limited the £20,000 reward to private vessels. The 1775 Act, which referred to the 'many advantages both to commerce and science' which the discovery of a passage would bring, opened the award to naval vessels as well as those privately owned, but stipulated that the passage must lie north of latitude 52° N. The reason for this curious change of wording will be considered when Cook's instructions of July 1776 are examined.

The Act also offered £5,000 to the crew of the first ship that approached within a degree of the North Pole, since 'such approaches may greatly tend to the discovery of a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans'. This clause suggests the influence of Barrington, and letters among the Sandwich Papers show that his role was much the same as that of Dobbs thirty years earlier: although not a member of Parliament himself, he worked diligently to ensure the bill's safe passage through the House of Commons, and persuaded the Bishop of Llandaff to guide the measure through the House of Lords. He

¹ Barrington to Royal Society, 30 March 1774. Archives of the Royal Society, Council Minutes, VI, p. 227.

² For the wording of the two Acts see *The Statutes at Large*, XVIII, pp. 327-9, XXXI, pp. 155-7.

also entered into a lengthy correspondence with Sandwich, who objected to some of the provisions in the first draft of the bill, and showed little sympathy with Barrington's proposals to encourage further exploration towards the pole. The First Lord was appalled by the suggestion that the £20,000 should apply equally to the reaching of the pole and the discovery of the Northwest Passage, and Barrington, despite his plea that 'those Gentlemen who patronis'd the bill, wish'd likewise a reward should be given for penetrating to the Pole',¹ was forced to whittle down the reward for approaching the pole to £10,000, and then to £5,000. The bill was held up for some months while these negotiations were in progress, and did not receive the royal assent until December 1775.

Cook, meanwhile, had returned with the *Resolution* in July, after a wearing voyage of three years that had finally demonstrated both his greatness as an explorer, and the success of his methods in banishing the scourge of scurvy from British ships. In a single voyage he had ranged systematically over vast areas of the south Atlantic and Pacific, and had shown that the centuries-old dream of a great and fertile southern continent was an illusion. He had accomplished this without the loss of a man from scurvy, an achievement so remarkable that it would have overshadowed the geographical results of his voyage had they been less momentous. On the long voyage Cook had also proved the accuracy of Harrison's chronometer; and with the development of the improved sextant from the quadrants of Hadley and Godfrey, future navigators were able to find longitude and latitude with a precision sufficient for all practical purposes.

During the voyage the *Resolution* had served Cook well, and on his return, instead of being paid off and dismantled as was normal procedure, the vessel was put into dock at Woolwich and held in readiness for further 'foreign service'.² Writers in the daily newspapers speculated widely and wildly about the desti-

¹ Barrington to Sandwich, 15 May 1775. Sandwich MSS.

² Admiralty to Cook, 17 Aug. 1775. Adm 2/733, p. 310.

nation of the rumoured new expedition, and whether Cook would again lead it, but when in August he was given a well-earned post of retirement as captain at Greenwich Hospital, it was generally accepted that Charles Clerke, his first lieutenant on the recent circumnavigation, would command the *Resolution* on its next voyage. It is true that Cook's advice was sought on various matters connected with the forthcoming expedition, but with the 'first navigator in Europe' (as Sandwich described Cook in a speech in the House of Lords in November) close at hand, this consultation seemed both natural and courteous. However, the Admiralty possibly had deeper motives in involving Cook in the preparations for the voyage, for early in 1776 the decision was taken—admittedly with some reluctance and hesitation—to find out whether he would be willing to accept command of the expedition.

The only account we have of the growing uneasiness at the Admiralty about the choice of commander for the great venture comes from Andrew Kippis, Cook's first biographer, but his description (obtained from Sandwich) of the informal dinner-party at which the conversation was deliberately turned to the forthcoming attempt on the passage, with the anticipated result that Cook offered his services, seems substantially accurate.¹ There are signs that from the beginning the explorer had qualms about his early retirement,² and his ever deep sense of duty was clearly touched by his realization of the magnitude of the task, and the Admiralty's dependence on him. Rightly or wrongly, Cook was placed under a strong moral obligation to volunteer. If the proposed voyage had been of a more routine nature, intended perhaps to explore some of the Pacific island groups still imperfectly known, there is little likelihood that he would have gone. The expedition could have been safely entrusted to Wallis or Clerke. But the challenge of the Northwest Passage was different; it presented a problem that had defied Europe's

¹ Andrew Kippis, *The Life of Captain James Cook* (London, 1788), pp. 324-5.

² See his letter to James Walker, 19 Aug. 1775, quoted in J. C. Beaglehole's edition of *The Journals of James Cook*, II (Cambridge, The Hakluyt Society, 1961), p. 960.

navigators for almost three centuries. And the temptation to Cook was the stronger because, as subsequent journal entries show, he was cautiously optimistic that he would finally solve the problem. To him was held out the possibility of commanding the first ships to sail through the Northwest Passage; and with the fame and honour would come a substantial proportion of the £20,000 reward, a motive of some importance to one who did not possess any inherited wealth although he now often moved in the highest circles of society. It was perhaps of this consideration that Cook was thinking when he wrote to his old master at Whitby shortly after his decision, 'If I am fortunate to get home safe, there is no doubt but it will be greatly to my advantage'.¹

Cook, nevertheless, should not have undertaken another voyage without a long period of rest; and wiser men would not have pressed him. For all but one of the previous seven years he had been away on voyages that were both physically gruelling and mentally exhausting. With him alone rested the responsibility for all decisions; at no time was there a superior at hand to give counsel and support. During those years the hardy physique and self-reliant disposition of the big northcountryman had borne the strain, but in the north Pacific he was faced with new problems. They were met resolutely, and mostly overcome, but at a cost to Cook's finely balanced sense of judgment that resulted in tragedy, for he was killed in an incident that occurred after weeks of friction and frustration during which he had shown less than his usual caution and tact.

However, that February day on the beach at Hawaii was three years distant when Cook was commissioned to his old ship, and in the months after his appointment he was busily engaged finishing his account of the second voyage and preparing the ships for the new expedition. To Cook and his experienced officers such preparations were by now relatively routine, and they were perhaps inadequately supervised; certainly the

¹ Cook to Walker, 14 Feb. 1776. Quoted in Arthur Kitson, *Captain James Cook R.N., F.R.S. 'The Circumnavigator'* (London, 1907), p. 347.

voyage ahead was to disclose serious deficiencies in the ships and equipment difficult to reconcile with Cook's normal scrupulous attention to detail. A revealing glimpse of the explorer's eagerness and impatience to be away on his quest is provided by Boswell, who wrote of a conversation he had with Cook at this time, 'I catched the enthusiasm of curiosity and adventure, and felt a strong inclination to go with him on his next voyage.'¹ But first the instructions for the voyage had to be determined, and not until July was the final draft (which represented the agreed views of Cook and his two friends and patrons on the Admiralty Board, Sandwich and Sir Hugh Palliser) drawn up, dated and signed.²

The expedition was set a tight time-table. Cook intended to enter the Pacific by way of the Cape of Good Hope, which he was expected to leave at the end of October or beginning of November. From there he was to sail south in search of the islands reported to have been sighted by the French in latitude 48° S., but he was not to linger over this task. Omai, a South Sea islander brought to England on the last voyage, was to be landed at Tahiti or the Society Islands, and Cook was then to steer a direct course for the coast of New Albion in latitude 45° N. After procuring refreshments there he was to sail along the coast to latitude 65° N., 'taking care not to lose any time in exploring rivers or inlets, or upon any other account, until you get into the before-mentioned latitude of 65°, where we could wish you to arrive in the month of June next. When you get that length, you are very carefully to search for, and to explore, such rivers or inlets as may appear to be of a considerable extent, and pointing towards Hudson's or Baffin's Bay.' This

¹ G. B. Hill (ed.) and L. F. Powell (reviser), *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (Oxford, 1934-50), III, p. 7.

² Cook's original instructions, dated 6 July 1776, are in B.M. Eg.MSS. 2177B. There is a copy in Adm 2/1332, pp. 284-96. The instructions were printed in the introduction by Dr Douglas to the published account of the voyage, James Cook and James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty, for making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. To determine the Position and Extent of the West Side of North America; its Distance from Asia; and the Practicability of a Northern Passage to Europe* (London, 1784), I, pp. xxxi-xxxv.

clause, although its directives had to some extent been anticipated by those provisions of the 1775 Act which stipulated that the passage should lie north of latitude 52° N., was the most striking feature of Cook's instructions. It placed him under strict orders not to explore that unknown coastline along which many geographers considered the straits of Fuca and Fonte lay, and which Byron, only twelve years earlier, had been ordered to search for a passage. There also, according to the old maps, lay the Strait of Anian; and in the decade before Cook's expedition half-hearted attempts had been made to cross overland from the eastern colonies to that part of the Pacific coast where the strait was thought to have its entrance.¹

The explanation for the Admiralty's switch in the direction of the search from the temperate Pacific waters above California to the near-Arctic regions farther north is to be found in the explorations of Hearne and Christopher, the publication in England of a map supposedly based on the latest Russian discoveries, and the theories of Engel and Barrington regarding the formation of ice. Hearne's account of his journey to the Coppermine River was not published until 1795, but a copy of his journal, and three of his maps, were in the possession of the Admiralty before Cook sailed in 1776. They were loaned to the Admiralty by the Deputy Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Samuel Wegg, whose attitude differed in many ways from that of his more secretive predecessors. He was a member of the Council of the Royal Society, and in close touch with Barrington, Pringle and others interested in Arctic exploration. With Hearne's account before them, it was clear to Cook and the Board of Admiralty that whatever inlets were discovered on the northwest coast of America they could not extend across the continent and into Hudson Bay, because Hearne had travelled

¹ These abortive expeditions, which were associated with Major Robert Rogers, lie outside the scope of this study. Rogers' views on the Northwest Passage were similar to those of Dobbs, whom he had met in North Carolina in the early 1760s, but it is uncertain whether he was genuinely interested in finding the passage: several scholars have maintained that his projects for westward exploration stemmed from his desire to control the Indian trade. See e.g. Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp. 260-1.

from Churchill to the shores of the Arctic Ocean in latitude $71^{\circ}55'$ N. without crossing any strait or great river.¹ This point was given added emphasis by the Admiralty's knowledge of the explorations made by the Company sloops along the west coast of Hudson Bay. Cook himself was a friend of the Company captain William Christopher, and since both men were in London during the winter before Cook sailed, it is reasonable to assume that they met and discussed the extent and significance of Christopher's explorations in Hudson Bay fifteen years earlier.²

Hearne's explorations seemed to dispel all expectation of a passage through North America, but his report of a sea in latitude 72° N. that was only partly frozen raised hopes that a passage might be found round the continent; and at this time there was additional reason to believe that a short and easy route might be discovered from the Pacific into the sea sighted by Hearne. For fifteen years Müller's map of 1758, which showed the coast of northwest America bulging out towards Kamchatka, had been accepted as the standard map of the Bering Strait region. If Müller was correct, and the outline marked on his map represented a continuous coastline, then the only way to the Arctic sea was through Bering Strait. In that event, the obvious route for Cook to follow would be across the Pacific to Kamchatka, and thence through Bering Strait, which lay only a short distance northeast. That Cook was ordered to sail first to the coast of New Albion, far to the east of Bering Strait, demonstrates that this was not the intention, and indicates that the Admiralty had accepted as authentic an account and map of recent Russian discoveries published in England in 1774 under the aegis of Dr Maty, Secretary of the Royal Society.³

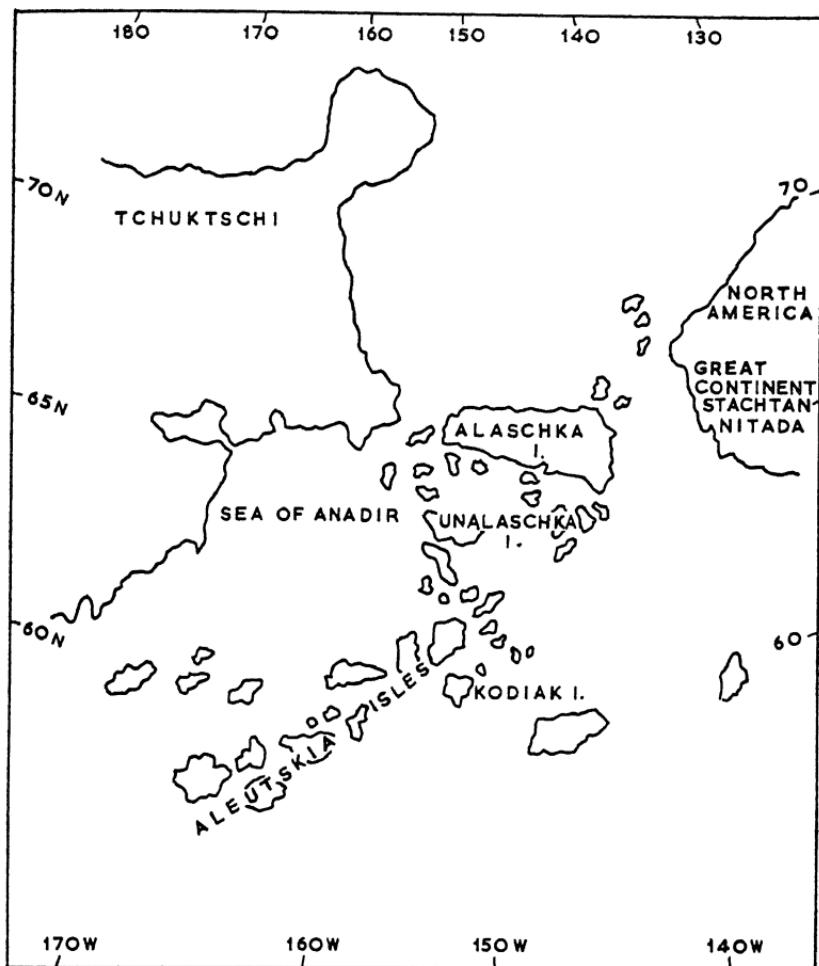
¹ Hearne's estimated latitude was in fact almost four degrees too far north, but it was accepted without question until 1789.

² Details of this friendship are to be found in a privately printed work (a copy of which was presented to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1958), written by A. C. S. Christopher in 1933, and entitled *The Family of Christopher and Some Others*.

³ J. von Stählin, *An Account of the New Northern Archipelago, Lately Discovered by the Russians in the Seas of Kamtschatka and Anadir* (London, 1774). A copy of the original German edition was presented to the Royal Society by Maty in June 1774. See *Journal Book of the Royal Society*, XXVIII, p. 100.

This work, originally written in German by von Stählin, Secretary to the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, and a recently elected Fellow of the Royal Society, described how in the years 1764 to 1767 Russian merchants trading east of Kamchatka under the protection of one Lieutenant Synd had discovered an extensive archipelago of islands between Asia and the American mainland. The accompanying map, which was similar to one issued by the Academy in 1773, marked these clusters of islands, and also showed Alaska, not as a peninsula, but as a large island. If the map, which purported to show the only known exploration of the northwest coast of America since Bering and Chirikov had beaten past it in the confusion of their disease-ridden, fogbound voyage of 1741, was accurate, then there was a much shorter way to the Arctic sea at the point where it had been sighted by Hearne, than through Bering Strait. Fifteen degrees east of that strait, Stählin's map marked a passage between Alaska and the American mainland. The southernmost part of this strait lay in latitude 65° N.; the latitude at which Cook was to begin his explorations. It was possible that there was a strait farther east still, where on Müller's map those stretches of coastline not sighted by the 1741 expedition were marked only with dotted lines, a cartographer's standard admission of uncertainty.

If the theories that Barrington had inherited from Engel were correct, and the ice of the northern seas was formed when the rivers broke up in the summer, and was thus a seasonal phenomenon limited both in time and area, then it should be possible for a ship to pass through one of these straits without obstruction from ice. Phipps in 1773 had not encountered the ice-pack until he reached latitude 80° N., which was eight degrees farther north than the point where Hearne calculated he had sighted the sea along the northern 'edge' of the continent. The theories of Barrington became current at a particularly apposite time, for just when Hearne's explorations seemed to confirm the impossibility of a passage in temperate latitudes, Barrington insisted that the dreaded Arctic Ocean was for most of the year



Alaska and Bering Strait: after J. von Stählin 1774

an open ice-free sea. Consequently, Cook's ships were not strengthened to meet ice.

Doubts about the practicability of the passage were centred rather at its Atlantic entrance, now suspected to lie somewhere along the west coast of Baffin Bay. This huge inland sea of the north had not been explored since 1616, when William Baffin had sailed as far as Smith Sound in latitude 78° N., and had

then turned back along its west coast without finding a passage. He had mistaken the three great sounds, which he named after Sir Thomas Smith, Alderman Jones and Sir James Lancaster, for gulfs; and not until the nineteenth century was it discovered that Lancaster Sound was actually the entrance to the Northwest Passage. On his return Baffin wrote, 'there is no passage nor hope of passage in the North of Davis Streigths, wee having coasted all or neere all the Circumference thereof, and finde it to be no other than a great Bay'.¹ His verdict was accepted, and while later explorers sought a passage in Hudson Bay, the area of Davis Strait was neglected except for the visits of whalers during the short summer season. After the failure of all attempts to find a strait along the west coast of Hudson Bay, the attention of the Admiralty in 1776 turned again to Baffin Bay, and it was decided that at the same time as Cook was seeking the western entrance of the passage along the Pacific coast, expeditions would be sent to Baffin Bay to search for its eastern entrance. This double-pronged attack constituted the most ambitious and thorough project yet undertaken to discover the Northwest Passage, but through faults both in conception and execution it was doomed to failure.

While these discussions were taking place in London, Spanish concern about the renewal of British interest in the Northwest Passage was mounting. Although since Byron's voyage the spotlight had remained focused on the south Pacific as the scene of clashing British, Spanish and French interests, the Spanish government had also been watching anxiously the northern limits of its American domains. In 1761 it had sent to St Petersburg its first diplomatic representative for more than thirty years, and between that date and 1775 a series of dispatches describing Russian explorations in the north Pacific arrived at Madrid.² For a century and a half the Spaniards had not ad-

¹ Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, XIV, p. 397.

² See Stuart R. Tompkins and Max L. Moorhead, 'Russia's Approach to America. Pt. II. From Spanish Sources, 1761-1775', *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XIII (1949), pp. 231-55.

vanced northward in California, but a succession of alarmist reports from St Petersburg and London strengthened the resolve of those members of the Spanish government who were determined on a general expansion of settlement along the west coast of North America. By sea and land the Spaniards began to occupy Upper California; and by 1770, spurred by reports from London that the British were intent on the discovery of a large river which ran from Lake Superior to the Pacific, and from St Petersburg that the Russians were preparing expeditions to the northwest coast of America, the Spaniards had reached and occupied San Diego and Monterey.

After the establishment of these bases the Spaniards sent probing expeditions to the north in 1774 and 1775, by which time rumours of British expeditions were causing more anxiety than Russian activity in the remote north. Reports had reached Spain in 1773 that an Englishman named Bings was undertaking a voyage to the North Pole, and thence to California (probably a garbled reference to the Phipps expedition), and the Spanish ambassador at St Petersburg had sent to Madrid accounts that the British had advanced so far west from Hudson Bay that they had made contact with the Russians on the Pacific coast. Bucareli, the Spanish viceroy of New Mexico, was rightly sceptical of this report, which he described as having 'the same appearance of invention as the pretended passage from that bay to our South Sea';¹ but it added to the general feeling of insecurity that was an important factor in the decision to send discovery expeditions to the north. The expedition of 1774, commanded by Perez, reached latitude 55° N., but bad weather and fog prevented it making a thorough survey of the coast. The next year a vessel commanded by Bodega reached the Alaskan coast in latitude 58° N., and then made a somewhat cursory examination of the coast to the southward during which a strait two leagues wide was discovered. Some years later a Spanish historian wrote of this strait, which lay in latitude

¹ Bucareli to Arriaga, 28 Sept. 1774. Quoted in Charles E. Chapman, *A History of California: The Spanish Period* (New York, 1923), p. 273.

55° N., that 'It was the opinion of the officers and sailors that if there is a passage on these coasts to the North Sea, in no place is it more likely to be than here'.¹ Farther south a consort that had been forced to turn back because of sickness among the crew sighted the bay at which the great river Columbia reaches the sea, and the report which its commander Heceta sent to Spain discloses that he considered it was perhaps the entrance of Fuca's strait.² A brief account of these explorations reached London in May 1776, and a later entry in Cook's journal shows that before leaving England he had read this report, which gave the impression that Spanish missions had been established along the coast possibly as far as the frigates had explored, although there were not in fact any settlements north of latitude 40° N.³

To the Spanish authorities the most reassuring aspect of the northern explorations was that no trace of foreign settlement or activity had been found; but the resultant feeling of complacency was short-lived. In March 1776 José de Gálvez, the able 'visitador-general' of New Spain, passed on to Bucareli rumours of a new expedition by Cook. The differing objectives reported to be among Cook's instructions—the return of Omai, exploration of the Ladrone Islands, establishment of commercial relations with New Mexico, and discovery of the Northwest Passage—led Gálvez to doubt the reliability of his information, but he pointed out to Bucareli that the British had not lost hope of finding a passage, and that the House of Commons had recently offered a reward for its discovery. All officers in the Californias were therefore ordered to be on the watch for Cook, and although they were to avoid force, were to try to hinder his activities in other ways. One method suggested was to be sparing in the granting of supplies. In July Gálvez informed Bucareli that

¹ Francisco Palou, *Historical Memoirs of New California*, ed. Herbert E. Bolton (Berkeley, 1926), IV, pp. 45–6.

² A translation of Heceta's report is contained in Robert Greenhow, *The History of Oregon and California and the other territories on the North-West Coast of North America* (London, 1844), pp. 430–33.

³ See *London Evening Post*, 29 May 1776; James Cook, MS. Journal, B.M. Eg. MSS. 2177A, p. 411.

Cook's ships had just left London, and were believed to be heading for northern California. He laid down sterner instructions for coastal officials, who were now told to deny the British ships admittance to Spanish ports. In October yet another order from Madrid instructed Bucareli (who had already pointed out how ill prepared the Spaniards were, even at Acapulco, to resist Cook by force), to attempt to detain and imprison the explorer when his expedition reached California.¹

This Spanish attitude of increasing hostility forms the background to Cook's third voyage, and raises the wider question of the motives behind the expedition. Investigation is made difficult because those most closely concerned with the venture left no written statements of their intentions; and the formal minutes and correspondence among the Admiralty records provide few clues. Determination of the reasons which finally prompted the Admiralty to send Cook to the north Pacific remains largely a matter for speculation, although the motives of those who pressed the government to send an expedition to discover the passage are normally clear (and varied) enough. The viewpoint of Daines Barrington, for example, who regarded himself as the unofficial promoter of the third Cook expedition, was characteristic of the group of enthusiasts at the Royal Society. Barrington was indignant that the Spaniards should regard Cook's explorations with suspicion, and thought they should 'be convinced that the English Nation is actuated merely by desiring to know as much as possible with regard to the planet which we inhabit';² but his explanation of British activities in the Pacific was inevitably coloured by his own attitude towards maritime discovery, and another theorist who sent Dartmouth a memoir about the passage reminded the Secretary of State that they were living 'à l'époque où l'on regarde la guerre avec l'Espagne

¹ The substance of these instructions from Gálvez to Bucareli, dated 23 March, 14 July, 18 Oct. 1776, is given in Chapman, *Founding of Spanish California*, pp. 376-80.

² Preface to 'Journal of a Voyage in 1775. To explore the coast of America, Northward of California', in Daines Barrington, *Miscellanies* (London, 1781), p. 472.

comme inévitable, et par conséquent la Conquête du Mexique et de la Nouvelle Espagne comme très prochaine'.¹

Again, in contrast to writers like Dobbs and Dalrymple who were intent on utilizing geographical discoveries for the promotion of British trade, Barrington was clearly little interested in the commercial developments that might result from the explorations he advocated. The spirit of scientific curiosity that led him to investigate subjects so diverse as the torpidity of swallows and the great deluge of Noah's time, largely accounted for, and conditioned, his interest in polar navigation; and only once, when he pointed out that the countries of northern Asia would provide a fine market for English woollens, did Barrington mention the trading advantages of his trans-polar route to the Pacific.² This reference was Barrington's only gesture in the direction of the conventional mercantilist tenets of his day, and one suspects that it was inserted to turn aside the censure of those who resented the expense of discovery expeditions unless they promised material advantages in the way of increased commerce or new settlements. A characteristic contribution from one such critic was a letter to a newspaper shortly before Cook sailed on his third voyage, in which a puzzled and indignant writer stated: 'I do not understand the reason why three successive expeditions should be made by the English government round the world, without any views of planting Colonies, or fixing Settlements.'³ Economy-conscious scrutinizers of government actions there are in every age, but it was Barrington, with his intense academic interest in problems of northern navigation, who typified the new spirit of investigation that was beginning to influence the course of maritime exploration.

This attitude was understandably difficult for the Spaniards to grasp; 'Generations of painful experience of English *corsarios* and smugglers did not make it easy for Spanish administrators to accept the English in the unexpected garb of scientists.'⁴ The

¹ Béat Tavel to Dartmouth, 27 Aug. 1774. Dartmouth MSS., D 1778, V 285.

² Barrington, *Probability of reaching North Pole*, pp. 87-8.

³ *London Evening Post*, 28 June/1 July 1776.

⁴ Harlow, *Founding of Second British Empire*, p. 52.

French also had doubts about the disinterestedness of the motives behind Cook's third voyage, and a memoir among the French Foreign Office papers noted that its ostensible object of exploring the northwest coast of America was a blind, and that Cook was actually bound for Kamchatka, where he was to assist a Russian project for the conquest of Japan!¹ For Spanish suspicion there was undoubtedly some justification: the Admiralty's decision to send expeditions to search for the Northwest Passage at a time when the international situation was worsening would seem to have been influenced by motives other than its genuine desire for 'the promotion of Natural knowledge'. The strategic importance of a passage, even one far to the north, should not be overlooked. When hostilities with Spain threatened, the thoughts of British ministers invariably turned to the attractive prospect of raiding Spanish commerce and settlements in the Pacific; but always there was the objection that raiders sailing around Cape Horn gave advance warning of their intentions. A British naval expedition that entered the Pacific through a northern passage would give no warning. Even if the passage were open for only a limited season each year, this would not present the obstacle to naval raiders that it would to merchants seeking to use the passage as a regular trade route. The efforts by the British government to establish a base in the Falklands had demonstrated its eagerness to secure an entrance to the Pacific, and it appears more than a coincidence that the decision to send a naval expedition in search of the Northwest Passage was made in the same year (1774) as the enforced abandonment of Port Egmont. The discovery of a northern route into the Pacific would compensate for loss of control over the longer southern one, and Cook received the customary order 'to take possession in the name of the King of Great Britain, of convenient situations in such countries as you may discover'.

Nor should commercial considerations be entirely ignored. The Council of the Royal Society might have little interest in

¹ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Mémoires et Documents, Angleterre/6, ff. 156-61 (dated 1776).

this mundane side of the voyages it urged on the Admiralty, but the desire to discover new markets for the increasing range and quantity of British manufactures had played its part in the sending of previous expeditions to the Pacific. Although the fact that the government allowed, indeed encouraged, publication of the journals and maps of the British explorers soon after their return emphasizes that the voyages were partly of a scientific nature, the words of Cook's editor show that he was well aware that they also had a commercial, competitive aspect. 'Every nation that sends a ship to sea', wrote Douglas, 'will partake of the benefit [of the published accounts]; but Great Britain herself, whose commerce is boundless, must take the lead in reaping the full advantage of her own discoveries'.¹ Traditionally, the Northwest Passage was of interest to Britain because its discovery was expected to stimulate British trade; and only a few years before Cook's expedition the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, when examining Major Rogers' plans for an overland expedition to find the passage, had agreed that 'a passage by the North west to the great pacific Ocean, would doubtless be attended with many great national Advantages both in Commerce and Navigation', though they questioned the practicability of the particular scheme put forward by Rogers.²

The discovery by Cook of a navigable passage would have been of added commercial value at this period because of the increasing importance of the East India Company's trade with China, which had taken the place of India as the Company's main trading area.³ A generation earlier the Company had received with mixed feelings news of an Admiralty project to send discovery ships to the north Pacific,⁴ but in 1774 Valtravers wrote to Lord Dartmouth asking whether the Directors of the Company might inspect a secret memoir on northern navigation

¹ Cook, *Voyage to Pacific Ocean*, I, introduction, p. lviii.

² Reports of Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations to Privy Council, 13 Sept. 1765 (C.O. 324/17, p. 476), and 17 March 1772 (C.O. 324/18, p. 411).

³ See Harlow, *Founding of Second British Empire*, pp. 64-8.

⁴ See Cramond to Scott, 24 Dec. 1772. Dartmouth MSS., D 1778, V 284.

sent by Engel to the government the previous year, because they were 'highly interested in a shorter and safer passage to their present and future settlements'.¹ The Company was anxious to develop trade with the northern provinces of China, and clearly, if attempts to open a direct trade with that region were successful, the short route provided by a Northwest Passage would be of considerable importance.

But despite these isolated indications of commercial interest, there is little evidence that trade considerations played the leading part in the decision to send Cook in search of a passage; at no time during the eighteenth century was the commercial importance of a passage given less weight than in the period of Cook's voyage. This was partly because of the far northern latitude in which it was thought to lie. If Cook found a passage open to shipping, then Britain's Pacific trade might well be transformed, but until his return there seemed little point in theorizing about unknown conditions; and the general lack of mercantile expectation at this time contrasted sharply with the surge of optimism that had preceded earlier expeditions to Hudson Bay. The disillusionments of those voyages had obviously brought caution: nor had Cook's demonstration of the non-existence of the alleged southern continent induced any great confidence in the geographical theorists, many of whom had argued that there was a continent just as eloquently as they sought to prove the existence of the Northwest Passage. The volumes of Campbell, Dobbs and Ellis were still on the shelves to be read, and if a passage were discovered their arguments might again be relevant; but until an easily navigable passage was found, there was nothing to be gained by prematurely reviving the enthusiasm of earlier days for a short trade route to the East.

¹ Valtravers to Dartmouth, 30 Dec. 1774. Printed in *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, 15th Report (London, 1896), Appendix, Pt. I, p. 212.

*The Baffin Bay Expeditions, and the
Voyage of James Cook*

THE plan drawn up by the Admiralty in 1776 envisaged a short preliminary voyage of discovery that summer, followed by a second expedition the next year which would explore westward from Baffin Bay at the same time, it was anticipated, as Cook was working through the passage from the Pacific.¹ Both Baffin Bay expeditions were to be entrusted to Richard Pickersgill, a lieutenant who had sailed around the world with Wallis and Cook; and in April 1776 he was appointed commander of the armed brig *Lyon*, which had been employed in surveying work off the Newfoundland coast under its master Michael Lane. Pickersgill was ordered to sail first to Davis Strait, and drive away any American privateers which might be preying on the British whaling fleet near Disco. That done, he was 'to proceed up Baffin's Bay and explore the Coasts thereof, as far as in your judgement can be done without apparent Risque'.² Whether, in view of the vagueness of these instructions, Pickersgill was given additional verbal orders, is not known; but his journal shows that he knew he was to command another expedition the next year, and his task in 1776 was clear enough—to search the west coast of Baffin Bay and investigate any promising inlets. These would be explored further the following season, so that if Cook's ships were encountered they could be guided into Baffin Bay, and back to England.

¹ In the event, Cook was unable to keep to his time-table; and since the Baffin Bay expeditions had finished their explorations before Cook reached the northwest coast of America, they will be examined first.

² Admiralty to Pickersgill, 14 May 1776. Adm 2/101, pp. 89–90.
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Pickersgill was supplied with maps by Bellin, Green and Van Keulen of the region he was to explore; accounts of the voyages of Baffin, Frobisher and Davis; Crantz's *History of Greenland*; and a vocabulary of Eskimo language from Palliser. The three maps were of little assistance, because only Baffin had explored the bay which bore his name, and no copy of his map existed. Green, in his *Chart of North and South America*, had tried to reconstruct the bay from Baffin's account, but its strange balloon-shaped appearance, and the large island shown partly blocking Davis Strait, reflects the unsatisfactory nature of this method of cartography. The Van Keulen map which Pickersgill took was probably his *Noord-Oceaen*, on which the east coast of Davis Strait was depicted in considerable detail, with soundings and other information taken from the reports of Dutch whalers. It extended, however, only as far north as latitude 73° N., and the fact that the map showed nothing of Baffin Bay is a sign that whalers rarely or never entered the great bay. Which of Bellin's maps Pickersgill had on board is not certain, but it was probably his *Carte Réduite des Mers du Nord*, which also marked a large island in Davis Strait in the latitude of Disco, and showed only the southern fringe of Baffin Bay. In short, Pickersgill had virtually no reliable information to guide him apart from Baffin's brief account.

Pickersgill took over the *Lyon* from Lane on 11 April, but the latter, though reputedly jealous of Pickersgill's appointment,¹ stayed on the vessel to act as surveyor as well as master. It was the middle of May before the brig left Deptford, where Cook's two ships were being prepared for the Pacific, and at the end of the month Pickersgill was still sheltering in Torbay rather than face the enthusiastic but amateurish attempts of his crew (over half of whom had never been to sea before) to handle the sails in the Channel squalls. 'All the men', he wrote in his journal, 'tho' willing yet hardly knew a Rope in the Ship, and more than once by their mistakes, and over-officiousness, put the Masts in

¹ See Reinhold Forster, *History of the Voyages and Discoveries made in the North* (London, 1786), pp. 407-8.

danger.¹ The brig was an unwieldy sailor, and the passage northward was so slow that the southern tip of Greenland was not sighted until 7 July. Fog, fever among the crew, and the collapse of a rotten foremast had all delayed progress; and although spirits revived with the sight of land they were soon damped again because early the next morning, Pickersgill recorded in his journal, 'we saw . . . a range of Field Ice, extending E. SW. which is almost beyond belief. What to do I know not the Water Smooth, no signs of an end to the field'. The vessel was only in latitude 60° N.

Pickersgill directed his crew to hang spars and pieces of wood over the side to protect the hull, which had not been strengthened for the voyage, and with lookouts at the mastheads, and men at the sides to fend off ice, the *Lyon* penetrated six miles into the field. Despite Pickersgill's makeshift devices the vessel received severe buffets from floating ice, and finally he took the brig out of the field, and tried to find a way around it. On 10 July a Whitby whaler was sighted, and its master came on board with the news that the British whaling fleet, which Pickersgill had been ordered to protect, had left Disco for home at the end of June. The master proved a veritable Jeremiah of the seas, and informed Pickersgill that the whalers, heavily strengthened though they were, never stayed near Disco after the beginning of July, since the weather then became thick and foggy, and great masses of ice drove down from the north. Nor was his reaction when he saw the ship in which Pickersgill hoped to enter Baffin Bay calculated to inspire confidence: 'He wished me success but seemed to despair of our ever coming back . . . he told us that the Vessel, would be crush'd by the first Ice we came into.'

With this doleful warning ringing in his ears Pickersgill put four of the guns, the weight of which tended to make the *Lyon* even more crank than she naturally was, into the hold; and

¹ Pickersgill Journal. Adm 51/540, Pt. VII. The quotations given in the following account of the 1776 expedition are taken from this journal, the pages of which are not numbered.

sailed on to 'examine the most likely places, which might be of Service the next Voyage'. This laudable intention notwithstanding, Pickersgill's need for wood and water forced him to cling to the eastern coast of Davis Strait, where Lane added to the lieutenant's troubles by demanding a boat to survey the shoreline, a task which Pickersgill pointed out would take years and serve no relevant purpose. Finally, a small harbour was found, and there the brig stayed for a week while its bows were strengthened with planks from the hold, rigging and sails repaired, and wood and water put on board. Some Greenlanders who came on board were eagerly questioned about the geography of the regions farther north, but gave only the discouraging information that they were 'full of ice'.

Soon after the *Lyon* sailed again Lane fell ill, and Pickersgill was liable to be called on deck at any moment. Still the brig was obstructed by loose ice, and at the beginning of August icebergs were sighted. The navigable season had clearly ended; and with many of the crew sick and lacking any warm clothing, Pickersgill decided to head for home. The farthest north the vessel had reached was latitude 68°26' N., nearly a hundred miles short of Disco. In heavy seas the brig, continually shipping water, slowly laboured southward until it found shelter on the Labrador coast. There the expedition stayed a month while the men recovered their health, Pickersgill indulged in frequent drinking bouts, and the ship was patched up. It was the end of October before Deptford was reached, and Pickersgill's journal had come to an abrupt end a month earlier, 'Being now taken Ill' he entered on 29 September.

Historians who have described the expedition have blamed Pickersgill for its failure;¹ but although he showed shortcomings lamentable in a commander of a discovery ship, it is doubtful

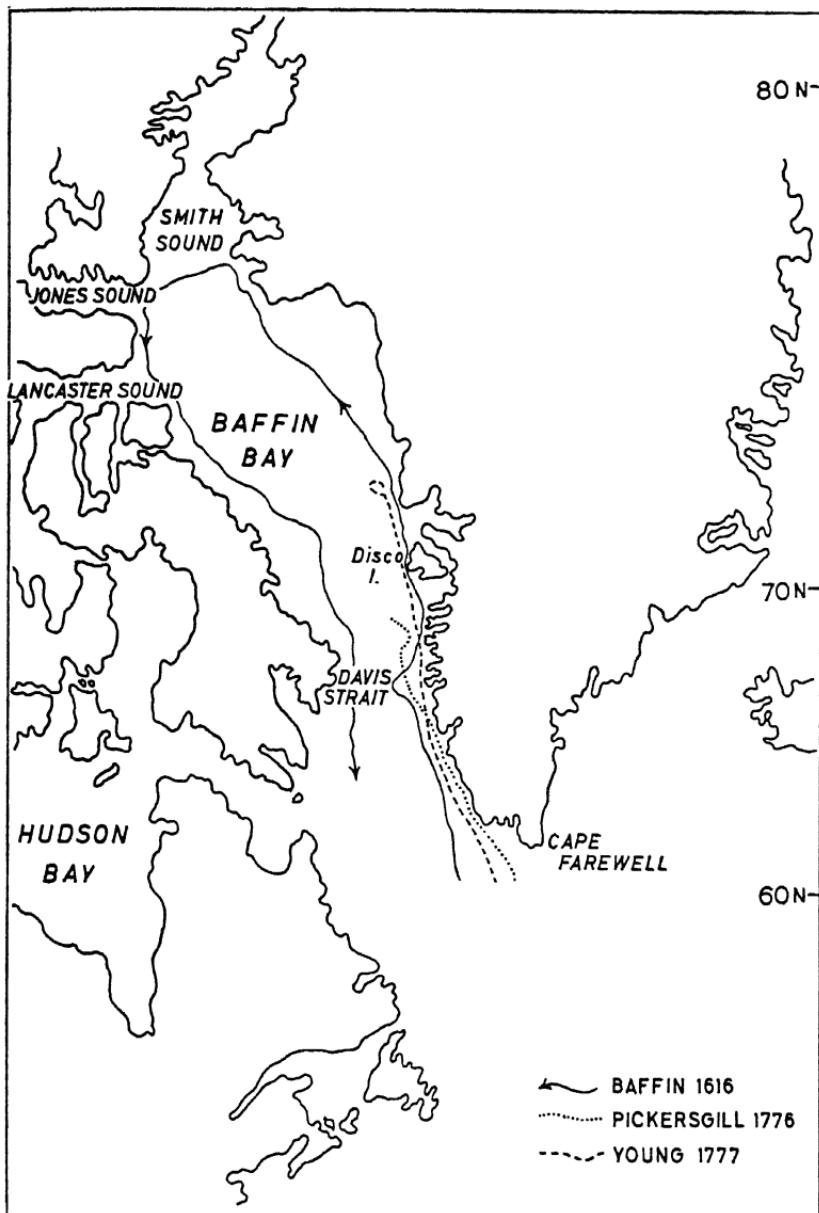
¹ Douglas made a few brief references to the Baffin Bay expeditions in his introduction to Cook's *Voyage to Pacific Ocean*, I, p. xl; but could give little detail because the logs could not be found at the Admiralty. There are short accounts of the two expeditions in John Barrow, *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions* (London, 1818), pp. 320-8; and Nellis M. Crouse, *The Search for the Northwest Passage* (New York, 1934), pp. 24-5.

whether a more sober and able man would have achieved much more under the same conditions. In particular, Pickersgill's course along the east rather than west coast of Davis Strait was based upon sound reasoning, and hardly deserves the derision accorded it in subsequent histories. Pickersgill had two precedents to guide him: Baffin's expedition of 1616 to the far north of Baffin Bay, and the later voyages of the whalers to the Disco region. Baffin found pack-ice drifting down the bay and strait, but managed to avoid most of it by keeping close to the east coast. Only once did he attempt to veer towards mid-channel, and the amount of ice he encountered soon made him desist. To the north Baffin found clear water, and was able to cross the top of the bay in latitude 78° N., and sail back southward along the west coast. He found more ice there than on the opposite shore, but was able to force his way through it and out into the open sea. When the Dutch and English whalers established their fishery in Davis Strait they always sailed north to Disco along the east coast between the ice and the shore; and when in the nineteenth century whalers at last reached Baffin's 'north water' at the top of the bay, they followed the route of the early explorer, for experience had shown that it was the safest track.¹ In 1818, on the first Arctic naval expedition after the Napoleonic Wars, Ross used Baffin's roundabout route to reach the west coast of the bay; and only later did Parry and other explorers force their way in heavily strengthened ships through the ice of mid-channel in a more direct route to Lancaster Sound and the Northwest Passage.

The Admiralty, rather than the unfortunate Pickersgill, must bear the blame for the failure of the 1776 expedition, for it sent him to the north with an unstrengthened vessel, an inexperienced crew, and indefinite instructions. These instructions, moreover, were not given to Pickersgill until the middle of May, and consequently he was two months late reaching Davis Strait. This was the most important cause of the expedition's failure

¹ See Clements R. Markham, *The Threshold of the Unknown Region* (London, 1876), pp. 135-8.

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because, as Cook's third voyage was soon to demonstrate, the most determined explorer could do little if he reached the Arctic with the navigable season spent.

For some time after the return of the *Lyon* Pickersgill was retained as commander (in itself a sign that the Admiralty was not disposed to blame him for the expedition's lack of success), and his representations about the necessity for altering the brig so that it might carry more provisions, and supplying the crew with a special issue of warm clothing for the 1777 voyage, were favourably acknowledged.¹ But in January Lane sent the Admiralty a letter containing various allegations about the lieutenant's conduct during the voyage, and three days later Pickersgill was informed that he was to be court-martialled on the strength of Lane's accusations that 'you had been frequently guilty of drunkenness and other irregularities both on board her and on shore during the late Voyage to Davis's Streights and particularly that, for the latter part thereof, you were scarcely two days together sober and were frequently so drunk as to be incapable of giving proper directions for the safe conducting the Vessel'.² At the court-martial Lane's charges were found to be proved 'in part', and Pickersgill was dismissed the navy.³

If Lane had hoped to be given command of the 1777 expedition himself, he was disappointed: on 10 February Lieutenant Walter Young was appointed to the *Lyon*. His instructions revealed more clearly than had Pickersgill's the connection between his voyage and the expedition under Cook, which was at this time expected to be approaching the Pacific coast of North America. Young was given a summary of Cook's instructions, and told it was his task to find a passage from the Atlantic side along the west coast of Baffin Bay, even if it meant that he had to winter in the north. He was given copies of

¹ Admiralty to Pickersgill, 7 Jan., 10 Jan. 1777. Adm 2/736, pp. 38-9, 57.

² Admiralty to Pickersgill, 23 Jan. 1777. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³ Minutes of Court-Martial, 6 Feb. 1777. Adm 1/5308, f. 81r. After his dismissal Pickersgill took command of a privateer, from which he fell into the Thames some years later and was drowned. See Forster, *Voyages and Discoveries in the North*, p. 408.

Hearne's journal and maps, and instructed 'to discover whether the Sea mentioned by the said Mr. Hearne doth communicate with Baffin's Bay and whether the Natives you may meet with about that Latitude have any Copper in use amongst them'.¹ To reach the sea sighted by Hearne from the mouth of the Coppermine River was the objective both of the Cook expedition and those sent to Baffin Bay, and presumably the Admiralty considered that the presence of copper among the Eskimos might guide Young towards that coast. Young was distracted by no convoy duties, his men were supplied with adequate clothing, his master had experienced the year before the conditions likely to be encountered, and an early start was made. Unfortunately, neither the ship nor its new commander was fitted for the task ahead.

The *Lyon* sailed in the middle of March, and by 5 June (before Pickersgill the previous year had left the English Channel) had reached Disco. Three days later the brig was in latitude 72°42' N. This was a creditable achievement, but Young was still on the east coast of Davis Strait, and there he was confronted with ice just as Pickersgill had been. For a fortnight he tacked between the ice and the shore in the company of the Disco whalers, and then, on 22 June, long before Pickersgill the year before had even sighted Greenland, Young bore away for home. The *Lyon* reached the Orkneys on 22 July, and was back at its Deptford mooring by the first week of August.

Young had completely ignored his instructions, and his expedition was perhaps the most inept ever sent in search of the Northwest Passage. His journal,² a brief and technical record, is to be searched in vain for an explanation of his extraordinary policy in leaving Davis Strait so early. It contains few observations of interest, but one of its most frequent entries, 'exercised great guns and small arms', perhaps hints at the reason for Young's failure. Thoroughly versed in the conventional naval tactics of the day, and capable of displaying great courage in the

¹ Admiralty to Young, 13 March 1777. Adm 2/1332, p. 322.

² Adm 51/540, Pt. VIII.

heat of battle, he was at a loss when confronted with the different, but equally nerve-tearing, problems of Arctic navigation. Neither he nor Pickersgill was familiar with the specialist techniques used in ice navigation, for the ability to 'read' the ice and to select the most promising lead through it was confined to the experienced captains of the Hudson Bay and Greenland ships. But this was an Admiralty project, and as such it failed. The Board, burdened it is true with the heavy responsibilities of the American war, had not even thought it necessary to engage seasoned Greenland pilots as it had for the Phipps expedition a few years earlier. Nor had it provided a vessel suited for so formidable a task, and as Pickersgill and Young compared the *Lyon*, in which they were expected to sail farther north in Baffin Bay than any navigator since 1616, with the strengthened ships of the whalers (which invariably sailed within sight of each other when among ice), any enthusiasm they possessed for the venture must have vanished. For its part, the Admiralty was learning that explorers of the stature of Cook, or even of the tenacity of Carteret, were a rare breed. The attempt to assist Cook by discovering and charting the eastern entrance of the passage had ended in complete and ignominious failure, and Sandwich and Palliser were no doubt thankful that the major and infinitely more difficult part of the project had been entrusted to Cook.

While Pickersgill in the *Lyon* was slowly sailing towards Baffin Bay, Cook left England for the long voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Pacific to the northwest coast of America. He had picked his officers with care, and most had sailed with him before. There was the high-spirited Charles Clerke, who had sailed with Byron, and on both Cook's previous voyages, and was now in command of the *Discovery*; John Gore, a fine seaman who had been with Wallis, and on Cook's first expedition; James Burney, who had sailed on the *Adventure* in the second voyage, and returned post-haste from America to join the third; and the scholarly James King, who kept an

exceptionally detailed and literate journal during the four years of the voyage.

Cook's instructions laid down that he was to reach the American coast in June 1777, but the expedition fell behind schedule from the beginning, and was already three weeks late when it left the Cape. Signs of shoddy work at the Deptford yards were apparent even at this early stage. The decks of the *Resolution* had been so badly caulked that in heavy rain it was impossible to keep the interior of the ship dry, and Gore penned a wry note to Sir Joseph Banks from the Cape: 'If I return in the Resolution the next Trip I may Safely Venture in a Ship Built of Ginger Bread.'¹ In the Pacific a succession of unfavourable winds further delayed the expedition, and although the ships were expected to leave Tahiti for the American coast in February 1777, they did not sail from New Zealand until the end of that month. In May, by which time it had long been clear that the search for the passage would not begin that year, the ships were still ten degrees to the leeward of Tahiti. That lovely and as yet unspoilt isle (Otaheiti to Cook's men) was eventually reached in August, and there the expedition remained for six weeks before sailing on to the nearby Society Islands.

To those members of the crews with Arctic experience the stay at Tahiti provided a delightful reminder of the advantages of the search for a passage along the Pacific coast, compared with the hurried probes along the ice-bound shores of the great bays of northeast America. The problem of how and where to winter had never been solved by the discovery expeditions sent to Hudson Bay from England, but in the Pacific this difficulty vanished. The navigable season on the northwest coast was much longer than in Hudson Bay—about six months instead of two—and expeditions could winter in the balmy climate of one of the Pacific island groups, where the winter season was a time of recuperation rather than ordeal. Furthermore, by the time of Cook's third voyage the menace of scurvy, which had weak-

¹ Gore to Banks, 27 Nov. 1776. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. I am indebted to Dr J. C. Beaglehole for this reference.

ened the Hudson Bay expeditions, had been largely overcome. Cook, and later Vancouver, reaped on their voyages in search of the Northwest Passage the benefits of their earlier experiences of Pacific navigation, and were able to carry out explorations of an extent unknown to those seamen who had sought a passage through the ice-choked waters on the other side of the continent.

In November the ships left the Society Islands and headed north for the sterner business of discovery. In the unknown stretches of the north Pacific a group of islands was discovered which Cook named after Lord Sandwich, and from there the ships sailed for the northwest coast of America.¹ On 7 March 1778 land was sighted when the ships were in latitude 44°33'N. (noon observation). After almost two hundred years English vessels had again reached New Albion, and the journals of Cook's officers reflect their curiosity as they strained for a glimpse through the haze of that mysterious coastline along which Drake had landed, and where (if the maps were to be trusted) Aguilar, Fuca and Fonte had discovered the entrances of great rivers and straits. But as the ships veered first south and then north again, the weather continued misty and stormy; only tantalizing glimpses of the land could be caught through the rain squalls, and Cook's main concern was to find a harbour where he could repair the vessels and take on board wood and water. He had hopes of finding such a haven in an opening which appeared on the far side of a headland in latitude 48°15'N., but as the ships drew nearer Cook decided that the opening was too small to afford promise of a harbour, and he named the headland Cape Flattery. In his journal he wrote: 'It is in the very latitude we were now in where geographers have placed the pretended Strait of Juan de Fuca, but we saw nothing like it, nor is there the

¹ Cook's explorations on the northwest coast have been generally neglected by his biographers, who have devoted most of their attention and space to his leisurely progress through the Pacific, and to the circumstances surrounding his death. Until Dr Beaglehole's magnificent edition of Cook's journals for the Hakluyt Society is complete, the best documented and most reliable account of the explorer's life and voyages remains that written in 1907 by Kitson; and even that thorough historian allocated less than a quarter of his pages on the third voyage to the actual search for a passage in the 1778 and 1779 seasons.

least probability that ever any such thing exhibited.¹ Although it was unusual for Cook to be dogmatic without good reason, the most cursory examination of the ships' logs shows that he could not have seen enough of the coast at close quarters to justify this pronouncement; Cape Flattery actually forms the southern part of the entrance to the strait now named after Juan de Fuca. During the night Cook headed northwest away from the strait, intending to close with the land again at daybreak, but severe gales prevented the expedition approaching the land for nearly a week, and curiosity about possible openings in the coast was submerged by alarm lest the ships be driven on shore.

When the ships made land again a harbour was found, and Cook demonstrated the measure of his relief by naming it after his sovereign. King George's Sound later became known by its native name of Nootka, and subsequent events gave it an international notoriety. The expedition remained nearly a month in the calm waters of the sound while the ships were rerigged, caulked and generally made trim. The discovery that the fore-mast of the *Resolution* was rotten, and the collapse of the mizen-mast a few days later, meant that both had to be replaced, and because of these vexing delays the ships did not leave the harbour until the last week of April. On board was a considerable collection of skins, mostly sea otter, which had been obtained from the Nootka natives whose possession of metal oddments and accomplishment in trade led the officers to guess that they had already been in touch, directly or indirectly, with Europeans; perhaps Russians from the north, or Spaniards from the south; possibly even Canadians or Hudson Bay men from the east.

¹ Journal of Captain James Cook, 22 March 1778. B.M.Eg.MSS. 2177A, p. 380. This holograph journal (referred to in subsequent footnotes simply as Cook Journal) was kept daily by Cook until shortly before his death, and on the expedition's return to England was handed over for publication to Dr Douglas, editor of the account of Cook's second voyage, and at this time Canon of Windsor. Comparison of the original journal with the account of the voyage published under Cook's name and Douglas' editorial supervision in 1784 shows that the latter interpreted his editorial functions liberally, and not content with rewriting the captain's narrative in a more elaborate style, was not above making the occasional alteration to the meaning of some of Cook's statements.

The ships sailed in bad weather, during which the *Resolution* sprang a leak that was to prove troublesome for the rest of the season, and rather than risk the danger of being swept on to a lee shore Cook headed out to sea. The entrance to Fonte's Río los Reyes was reputed to lie in latitude 53° N., but land was not sighted until the ships were in latitude 55°20' N., and Cook wrote that he regretted

very much that I could not do it sooner, especially as we were passing the place where Geographers have placed the pretended strait of Admiral de Fonte. For my own part, I give no credit to such vague and improbable stories, that carry their own confutation along with them, nevertheless I was very desirous of keeping the coast aboard in order to clear up this point beyond dispute; but it would have been highly imprudent in me to have engaged with the land in such exceeding tempestuous weather, or to have lost the advantage of a fair wind by waiting for better weather.¹

As a rule Cook was ever ready to go beyond his instructions to settle some controversial question, but on this occasion an examination of the coastline could have been accomplished only at the expense of the main objective; and those geographers who later criticized Cook's sketchy survey of the long stretch of coast between Cape Flattery and Mount St Elias had evidently not studied the explorer's emphatic instructions on this point: 'you are . . . not to lose any time in exploring rivers or inlets, or upon any other account, until you get into the aforementioned latitude of 65°'.² One season had already been lost, and so Cook kept steadily north, passing and naming Cape Edgecumbe, Cross Sound and Cape Fairweather.

On 10 May the ships were off Bering's Mount St Elias, the towering peak of which was first sighted when the expedition was more than a hundred miles distant. At this spot Müller's map showed the coast trending northward, and Cook and his officers, who had previously found much difficulty in identifying various landmarks with the account and map of Bering's voyage

¹ *Ibid.*, 30 April 1778, pp. 430-1.

² Cook, *Voyage to Pacific Ocean*, I, p. xxxiii.

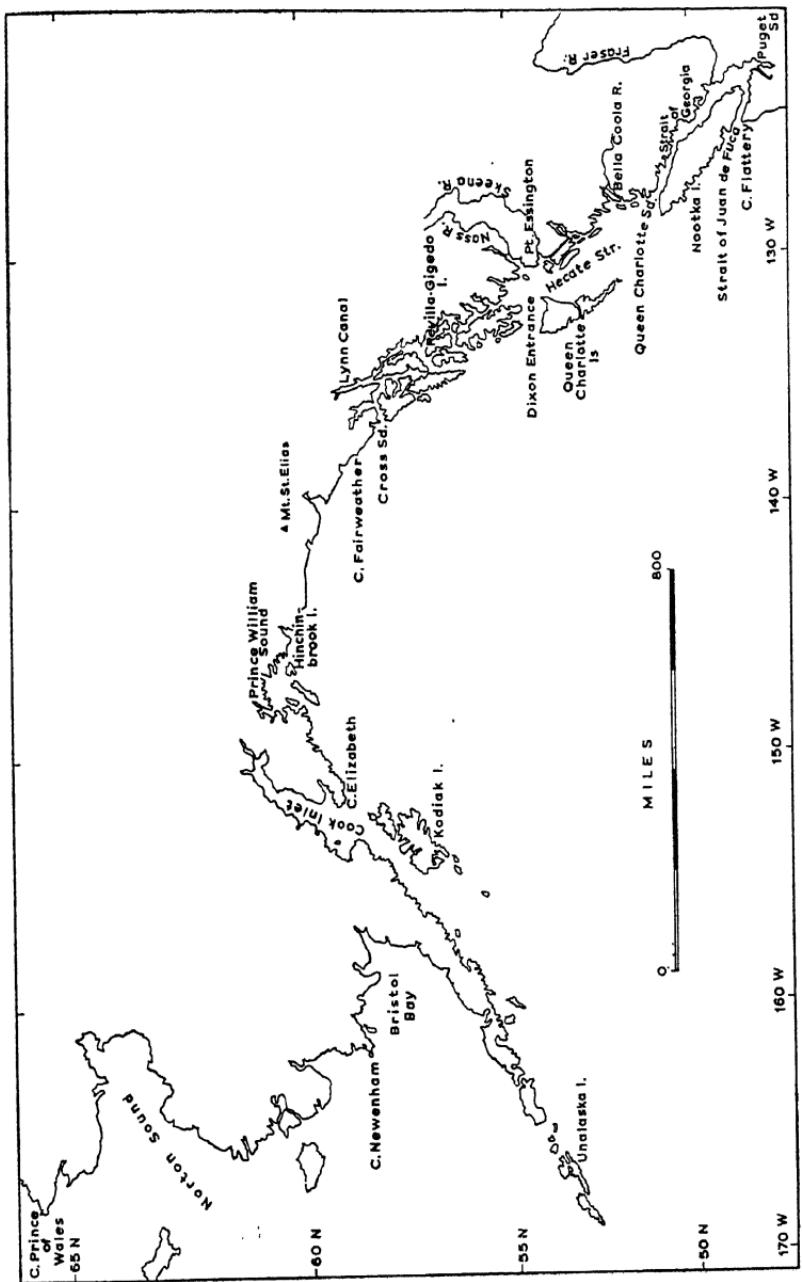
printed by Müller, were perturbed to find that the coast turned, not north, but west. In spite of this discrepancy the officers remained convinced that the passage to the north indicated on Stählin's map must soon appear, and one of King's journal entries reflects the air of tense expectancy on board the ships: 'We have Dr Matys [i.e. Stählin's] map of the N^oern Archipelago constantly in our hands, expecting every opening to the N^oward will afford us an opportunity to seperate the Continent . . . We are kept in a constant suspense, every new point of land rising to the S^oward damps our hopes till they are again reviv'd by some fresh openings to the N^oward.'¹ Finally, beyond Cape Hinchinbrook, as it was being noticed with dismay that the distant shore bore away to the south, a large opening came into view. Feelings of relief and hope were recorded in many journals. While Cook wrote 'we had reason to expect that by the inlet before us, we should find a passage to the North, and that the land to the West and S.W. was nothing but a group of islands', Lieutenant Rickman speculated whether the Strait of Anian had at last been discovered, and James Burney thought it possible that the expedition had reached the western tip of America.²

As the ships sailed up the inlet (named Sandwich Sound by Cook, but subsequently known by the name it was given in the published account of the voyage, Prince William Sound) Cook thought it ominous that the flood-tide entered the sound by the same channel that the ships were passing through. However, the experience of Hudson Bay expeditions had warned of the danger of putting too much reliance on tidal observations,³ and the officers understood from some natives who came on board that

¹ Log of Lieutenant James King, 12 May 1778. Adm 55/122, f. 31v. This will be referred to in subsequent footnotes as King Log.

² Cook Journal, 12 May 1778, p. 438; [John Rickman], *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean on Discovery* (London, 1781), p. 247; James Burney, *A Chronological History of North-Eastern Voyages of Discovery; and of the Early Eastern Navigations of the Russians* (London, 1819), p. 221.

³ King was at pains to emphasize this point, and at the end of the season wrote: 'The direction of the tides has in all similar voyages to ours, been the great objects of attention to their Conducters, and has given rise to contrary



further search, but that when a fine breeze sprang up the next morning he cancelled his order. 'It is not to be presumed', added Riou, 'that the Grand or N:W: passage is here meant . . . but a shorter Way to the Northward.'¹ Cook himself pointed out the same day that the ships were over five hundred leagues west of Baffin Bay and Hudson Bay, and that there was no likelihood of finding a strait of that length. Rather, as the young midshipman appreciated, the expedition was searching for a short strait which would carry it into the sea sighted by Hearne, and thence into Baffin Bay by the route which Pickersgill should have been investigating in 1776 and 1777. Although it is evident that Cook, most thorough of explorers, and one who was well aware of the ingenuity of geographers in turning partly explored inlets into wide straits, was tempted to stay longer in Prince William Sound to remove the least element of possibility that it might lead farther north, the favourable breeze early the next morning settled his doubts.

When the ships reached the open sea once more, they sailed southwest along the Alaskan coast until a high point of land was sighted which Cook named Cape Elizabeth. At first, he thought the headland might mark the western extremity of the North American continent, and although land appeared to the southwest hopes remained high. The continued reliance on finding the wide strait marked by Stählin, and the fact that the Müller map left a space near this region, 'inspired us', wrote Cook, 'with hopes of finding here a passage Northward without being obliged to proceed any farther to the South'.² Northward the horizon of sea and sky was unbroken, while to the west there appeared to be only a number of islands. Disillusionment came on 26 May, when the distant 'islands' were found to be mountain tops pushing through the mist, and a dejected entry in Cook's journal noted: 'I was fully persuaded that we should find no passage by this inlet, and my perservering in it was more to

¹ Log of Midshipman Edward Riou, 18 May 1778. Adm 51/4529, Pt. III, f. 86v.

² Cook Journal, 24 May 1778, p. 454.

satisfy other people than to confirm my own opinion.¹ Others remained hopeful for some time, but soon a number of inauspicious signs damped the expectations of all but a few stubborn optimists. The ebb-tide flowed southward back towards the entrance of the inlet, the water became fresher and muddier, and land was sighted to the north.

In latitude 61° N. the channel was found to divide, and boats were sent to explore the two branches 'to satisfy', wrote Samwell, 'the Doubts of one of the Officers who had been all along persuaded that there was a Passage here contrary to the Opinion of Captⁿ Cook himself and of every Officer in the Ship'.² The eastern branch was found to peter out in a small river which Cook named the Turnagain, but William Bligh, master of the *Resolution*, discovered that the northern branch was navigable for ships as far as he went, where it divided once more. Cook thought it probable that the various branches of the river were navigable for ships some distance farther than the boats had explored (a mistaken conjecture which was soon to stimulate attempts to reach the upper stretches of the supposed river from the lakes of the interior), but he reflected sadly on the valuable fortnight lost in settling 'nothing but a trifling point of geography', and commented with unusual bitterness on the 'late pretended Discoveries of the Russians', and the perversity of those of his officers who had insisted that a passage would be found through the inlet.³ The fact was that Cook, despiser of the Fuca and Fonte school of imaginative geographers, was following a map as unreliable as any produced by that group, and his increasingly irate journal entries reveal his feelings of frustration as he searched in vain for a strait to the north.

¹ *Ibid.*, 26 May, p. 456.

² Samwell Journal, 31 May 1778, f. 122r. The dissentient officer was again probably John Gore.

³ *Journal of Captain James Cook*, 6 June 1778. Adm 55/112, f. 78r. (This journal differs considerably from that in Eg.MSS. 2177A; it covers the period 1 Sept. 1777 to 27 Nov. 1778). Cook did not name the river discovered at the end of May 1778, and Sandwich later suggested it should be known as Cook's River. When Vancouver's expedition discovered that it was not a river, but an inlet, its name was changed to Cook's Inlet. It now appears on the maps as Cook Inlet.

Hampered by adverse winds, the ships did not reach the mouth of Cook Inlet until 6 June, and from there sailed southwestward along the coast, with the officers still trying to identify various features with those described in Bering's account. All Cook's actions at this time demonstrated his haste to get round the continent, and an incident on 26 June showed that he was taking risks which normally he would have avoided. That day, although on an uncharted coast, and in weather so thick that visibility was less than a hundred yards, Cook let the ships run blindly before a moderate wind, and only heaved to when the water shoaled suddenly and breakers could be heard. As the fog cleared Cook found that the ships had run through rocks into an anchorage 'where I should not have ventured in a clear day', and that they had escaped disaster by the narrowest margin.¹

At last, the long tongue of the Alaskan peninsula was rounded, and as the ships sailed northeast along its northern shore there was general relief that after weeks of sailing west and south the expedition was now heading in the right direction. But for the third time the hopes of all on board were shattered, for on 9 July land was seen stretching away far to the northwest. The ships had run into the blind alley of Bristol Bay, and had to sail nearly two hundred miles westward to get out of it. Not until 23 July were the ships clear of the shoals of this region and able to round Cape Newenham, and meanwhile the season was passing rapidly; it was more than four months since the expedition had first reached the American coast. As Cape Newenham was left behind King again pondered over the Müller and Stählin maps, and pointed out their deficiencies: 'as we have already Sailed over a great Space where Muller places a Continent, we can no longer frame any supposition in order to make our Charts agree with his . . . There is no saying positively that Dr Mattys map is equally faulty . . . only that as far as we yet can judge, there never was a Map so unlike what it ought to be.'²

The ships headed north towards Bering Strait until on 9

¹ Cook Journal, 26 June 1778, p. 487.

² King Log, 23 July 1778, f. 62r.

August the western tip of the American continent was finally sighted, and named Cape Prince of Wales. The ships sailed west from the cape and soon sighted land again, which Cook named East Cape. The vessels were obviously in a strait of some kind, but to identify it with any hitherto described was no easy matter. The strait discovered by Bering in 1728 and Gwosdev in 1732 was shown on Müller's map as being more than one hundred miles wide, while neither of the two northern straits marked on Stählin's map bore the least resemblance to the one the expedition was passing through. However, with a clear sea to the north, the matter did not seem of great practical importance, and the crews were more concerned, wrote King, 'to compute the distance of our Situation from known parts of Baffin bay'.¹ The ships made good progress northeast, and on 17 August more than sixty miles were covered, but then came one of the most dramatic and disheartening moments of the voyage. Cook wrote, in his precise, slightly pedantic, manner:

Some time before noon we perceived a brightness in the Northern horizon like that reflected from ice, commonly called the blink; it was little noticed from a supposition that it was improbable we should meet with ice so soon, and yet the sharpness of the air and gloomyness of the weather for two or three days past seemed to indicate some sudden change. At 1 p.m. the sight of a large field of ice left us in no longer doubt about the cause of the brightness of the Horizon we had observed. At $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 we tacked close to the edge of it in 22 fathoms water, being then in the latitude of $70^{\circ}45'$; not being able to stand any farther, for the ice was quite impenetrable, and extend from WbS to EbN as far as the eye could reach.²

Surprise and disappointment were the greater because Phipps in 1773 had reached a latitude nearly ten degrees farther north before encountering the Spitzbergen ice-barrier. A clear sea to that latitude, as might reasonably have been expected, would have given an ice-free passage into Hearne's sea in latitude 72° N., and thence into Baffin Bay; but as the ships sailed east-

¹ *Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1778, f. 73r.

² *Cook Journal*, 17 Aug. 1778, p. 519.

ward along the field of ice it rose in a wall ten or twelve feet above the water, and appeared to become even higher away from the edge. King noticed that the ice was broken into lumps in places, and that specially strengthened ships might have forced their way some distance through it, but neither ship was equipped for work among ice; a further indication of the surprise caused by meeting so formidable a barrier in this latitude. Barrington had maintained that the ice found on the surface of the sea in high latitudes came from the rivers of the northern continents when they broke up each summer, and that any fields formed would be neither permanent nor of any great height. Cook, who had previously assumed that Barrington's theory was correct,¹ pointed out that the height of the wall of ice blocking the ships' progress made nonsense of the assumption that the ice had come from the shallow rivers of northern Asia; and he thought that it must have been formed at sea. Added cause for depression, and indeed alarm, was that the ice was steadily moving southward, and after sighting and naming Icy Cape on the American mainland Cook turned away to the southwest to prevent the ships being crushed between the shore and the oncoming ice.

The expedition sailed close to the ice as it made towards the coast of Asia, but could see no way through it. Near the end of August the Asian coast was sighted at a point which Cook named Cape North and there, with the ships manoeuvring in snow and fog, and with no sign of a break in the ice, he decided to bear away to the south and find winter quarters. It was characteristic of Cook that after a hard season of frustrating exploration he was concerned to find a wintering place where not only could his crews rest themselves in preparation for another attempt on the passage the next year, but where he could 'make some improvement to Geography and Navigation'.² He decided that this could be best accomplished by wintering at the newly discovered Sandwich Islands, and that on the way there he would

¹ See King, *Voyage to Pacific Ocean*, III, p. 274.

² Cook Journal, 29 Aug. 1778, p. 530.

explore more thoroughly those parts of the American coastline between Cape Newenham and Bering Strait past which he had hurried on his way to the north a month earlier. If no opening were found in that region, then next summer the ships would sail direct to Bering Strait to try again for the passage.

As the ships passed the coast south of Cape North and sailed through the strait back into the Pacific, it became clear that the starboard shore was the eastern tip of Asia, explored and described by Bering. This point settled, Cook was more than ever baffled by Stählin's map of the Northern Archipelago and *island* of Alaska, and could only conclude that he had somehow missed the strait separating Alaska from the American mainland. It was to search for this channel that Cook was returning to the American coast south of Cape Prince of Wales, for his discovery that the sea north of Bering Strait was blocked by a barrier of ice made it the more imperative to find an alternative route to Hearne's sea which would bypass that obstacle. Along the previously unsurveyed coastline south of Bering Strait a large sound was discovered which Cook named after Sir Fletcher Norton (Speaker of the House of Commons), but as the ships sailed up it he noted that the shoaling of the water made it unlikely that it was a passage. Nevertheless he ordered King, who was optimistic that it would lead north into the Arctic Ocean, to explore the sound and determine whether or not it divided Alaska from the continent of America. King soon discovered that Norton Sound terminated in a small river, and on returning to the *Resolution* to report this to Cook, found his captain already 'pretty certain of the Event'.¹

The ships now bore away for the Sandwich Islands, but first put in at the island of Unalaska, where the leak in the *Resolution*, first sprung off Nootka, and a source of anxiety ever since, was once more repaired. At the harbour on the island Russian traders and seamen, who were encountered for the first time, disclaimed knowledge of many of the islands scattered about on Stählin's map, while the expedition's officers now noted that some groups

¹ King Log, 17 Sept. 1778, f. 84r.

of islands were shown twice on the map—under different names and about ten degrees of latitude apart! For five months Cook had paid respectful attention to Stählin's whimsical fabrication, but now his wrath found vent: 'If Mr. Staehlin was not greatly imposed upon what could induce him to publish so erroneous a map! in which many of these islands are jumbled in regular confusion without the least regard to truth, and yet he is pleased to call it a "very accurate little Map". A Map that the most illiterate of his illiterate seafaring men would have been ashamed to put his name to.'¹ Cook's indignant outburst was provoked by his realization of how grievously he had been misled by the map. His customary shrewd judgment of the works of imaginary geography had for once deserted him, and the result had been that the unremitting efforts of his crews had been guided in the wrong direction.

It could not be expected that Cook, in the few busy months before his departure from England in July 1776, should have become an authority on the Russian explorations, and he was doubtless influenced by the fact that the maps of 1773 and 1774 were sanctioned by the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Even so, his acceptance of the Russian maps is surprising in one normally so sceptical of the unauthenticated products of cartographers. In contrast, William Coxe, whose history of the Russian voyages of exploration was published in 1780 (and written before any details of Cook's voyage were known), adopted a far more cautious attitude towards the Stählin map, and that of 1773 on which it was based.² He pointed out that the latter was mainly a copy of a manuscript map sketched from the reports of traders who had sailed east of Kamchatka, and that the newly discovered islands laid down on it were 'extremely erroneous'. He had grave doubts about the conversion of Alaska from a peninsula to an island, and quoted a letter from Müller, who wrote that Lieutenant Synd knew nothing of this carto-

¹ Cook Journal, 16 Oct. 1778, p. 565.

² William Coxe, *An Account of the Russian Discoveries between Asia and America* (London, 1780), pp. 283-4, 300-2.

graphical innovation. Stählin's book gave the impression that the accompanying map was constructed from the original reports of traders in Synd's convoy, but Coxe maintained (and later historians have supported him) that Synd landed for only a short time near the western tip of America, and made no attempt to survey the coast farther east. Even Daines Barrington, not the most critical of geographers, was sceptical of Stählin's wondrous map, and concluded that it was 'so unlike the notion Behring conveys of these straits, that no credit can be given to it'.¹

Cook's vain efforts to reconcile the map with the coastline revealed to the expedition led to a waste of time and energy that could be ill afforded. For the first time in his career Cook was haunted by the continual worry of all Arctic explorers; the shortness of the navigable season. Time and again he was faced with the problem of whether he should leave inlets and stretches of coastline unexplored in his haste to get to the north, or whether he should make his customary meticulous survey of the coast, and perhaps arrive at a passage too late in the season. His instructions were clear enough. He was to sail to latitude 65° N. before beginning exploration; but it was reaching that latitude which presented the problem. The dilemma was posed in its most acute form in Cook Inlet, which he carefully explored even though his own judgment urged him to sail westward. Cook, always a perfectionist, perhaps tried to do too much. Moved between conflicting desires to satisfy the doubts of his more obstinate officers on all points regarding a passage, to give the Russian maps every possible chance to prove their accuracy, and to push to the north, he arrived at the polar sea too late. For ten months of the year the ice-pack is locked tight to the coast between Bering Strait and Point Barrow (the northern tip of America), until in early July the seasonal southeast wind normally pushes the ice away from the land, leaving a lane of

¹ [Daines Barrington], *Summary Observations and Facts . . . to show the Practicability and good Prospect of Success in Enterprises to discover a Northern Passage . . .* (London, 1776), p. 24.

open water. In August the wind changes to the northwest, and the pack returns, to rest in the shallow waters near the shore; and by the time Cook reached Icy Cape in mid-August 1778 the pack was already grinding against the shoals. Cook could have known nothing about this annual phenomenon, and even if he had, his unstrengthened ships left him in no position to take advantage of it. If he had arrived earlier in the season, and been rash enough to sail eastward past Point Barrow, it is unlikely that his ships would have ever returned.

The course of the expedition was based on two fallacies: Stählin's guess that there was a short strait east of Alaska, and Barrington's conviction that ice would not present any serious obstruction to navigation in the Arctic Ocean. With conditions as they actually were, Cook had been set an impossible task; and that under the circumstances he lacked his normal certainty of touch is understandable. In confidence, professional detachment and the handling of his crew, Cook fell short of the majestic standards of his second voyage; but judged by any other measure the results of his single season of exploration were remarkable. He had charted the American coastline from Mount St Elias to Icy Cape, determined the position and extent of Bering Strait, and to the south of Mount St Elias touched (as had the Spanish explorers of 1774 and 1775) at various places along a coast previously unvisited by Europeans.

After Cook made arrangements at Unalaska to have a letter and chart sent to the Admiralty by way of Kamchatka and St Petersburg the ships turned south towards the Sandwich Islands. As they did so more than one officer reflected upon the explorations of the summer, and the chances of finding a passage the next year. There were few grounds for optimism, and Cook, when he informed the Admiralty that he intended to try for the passage again the next summer, stressed that he had little hope of success.¹ Prospects of winning the £20,000 reward had vir-

¹ Cook to Admiralty, 20 Oct. 1778. Adm 1/1612, Pt. 34. See also Burney, *North-Eastern Voyages of Discovery*, p. 246; King Log, 10 Oct. 1778, ff. 101v-102r.

tually vanished, and the realization of this no doubt acted as an irritant to an already weary crew.¹ Although the ships sighted the Sandwich Islands at the end of November, they were unable to find a suitable port until they reached Hawaii in the middle of January, and these final six weeks of frustration, with reduced allowances of pork and vegetables, had a depressing effect on the spirits of the men, some of whom sent Cook 'a very mutinous letter' refusing to drink a brew of sugar-cane in place of their customary beer.² Such prejudices were not uncommon even among Cook's crews, who on this and previous voyages had occasionally shown a conservative distrust of culinary innovations; but the length to which they went during this incident indicates an unusual degree of strain and exasperation, which on Cook's part led to a stopping of the men's grog ration, and a long diatribe in his journal about his 'mutinous turbulent crew'.³

The ships stayed at Hawaii for only eighteen days, but had to return within a few days of sailing when the foremast of the *Resolution* again gave way. On their return, relations with the inhabitants deteriorated. Cook underestimated or ignored the growing hostility of the natives, and when on 14 February he went ashore at Karakakoa Bay (now Kealakekua Bay) to recover a stolen cutter, he was killed in a scuffle on the beach. Four days earlier, on the third anniversary of the commissioning of the two ships, the surgeon Samwell had entered in his journal, 'tho' we have still a long prospect before us and an arduous Undertaking in hand yet when we consider the Man who is to lead us through it we all agree that Nil desperandum . . .'.⁴ Now that leader was dead, and of the many tributes paid to the great

¹ During the stay at Tahiti in 1777 Cook and Clerke had stressed to their crews the value of the reward offered by Parliament, and that they were entitled to a share of it. See Journal of Midshipman Henry Martin, 14 Aug. 1777. Adm 51/4531, Pt. I, f. 44r.

² King Log, ff. 110v-120r.

³ Cook Journal, 7 Dec. 1778, pp. 593-4. This entry was not included in the published edition of Cook's journal; nor were some sweeping charges which he made at this time about the quality of the naval stores with which he had been supplied printed in full.

⁴ Samwell Journal, 10 Feb. 1779, f. 193r.

explorer, the few words written by the German coxswain Heinrich Zimmermann perhaps express most accurately the effect Cook's death had on his men: 'Everyone in the ships was stricken dumb, crushed, and felt as though he had lost his father.'¹ The blow was the more severe because Charles Clerke, the faithful subordinate who had accompanied Cook on all his voyages, and on whom the burden of command now rested, was himself dying of consumption and unable to exercise personal direction of the ships. One of the most moving features of the long voyage was the way in which the expedition followed the orders of its captains—the one dead, the other incapacitated—and returned to the bleak Arctic seas in pursuit of a task recognized by all on board to be impossible.

The ships left the Sandwich Islands in the middle of March, and arrived at Kamchatka at the end of April. When the snow-covered shores of Kamchatka were viewed for the first time, the wisdom of Cook's decision not to winter there was more fully appreciated. 'The very idea of our situation had we wintered here', observed King, 'made us Shudder again.'² After a stay of six weeks, the ships left Kamchatka for Bering Strait. The strait was passed on 5 July, but the next day the familiar ice-barrier was sighted in latitude 67° N. The two ships made repeated attempts to get through the drift-ice which lay off the pack, and received violent blows from loose floes. As the ships worked their way from the American side of the pack to the Asian coast there was no hope that a way would be found through the ice, and the farthest north that the ships reached was latitude 70°33' N., five leagues short of that attained the previous year. The *Discovery* was so badly battered by ice that it was estimated she would need three weeks in port for repairs, and in the last order he gave before his death Clerke instructed that the ships should make for Kamchatka to carry out these repairs, and then return to England.

On the homeward voyage the ships called at Canton, where

¹ F. W. Howay (ed.), *Zimmermann's Captain Cook* (Toronto, 1930), p. 102.

² King Log, 29 April 1779, f. 168v.

the sea otter skins casually collected along the American coast were sold for £2,000, even though many of them were ragged and torn; and some of the crew came near to mutiny in their eagerness to put back to the scene of their hardships on the northwest coast and collect another cargo. Two in fact deserted and were never recaptured, but the rest sailed on for England. The weatherbeaten ships arrived home in October 1780, with their crews bearing in their very persons a final testimony to the greatness of their dead commander, for on this voyage of four years only five men had died from sickness, and not one from scurvy.

Revived Hopes of a Navigable Passage

NEWS of Cook's death preceded the return of his ships, for on 10 January 1780 the Admiralty received a dispatch sent by Clerke the previous year from Kamchatka, together with a duplicate of the letter written by Cook in October 1778 at Unalaska. The next day a brief account of the tragedy appeared in *The London Gazette*, although no details were given of Cook's explorations. It was merely stated that Clerke 'was preparing to make another Attempt to explore a Northern Passage to Europe', and readers were left to assume that Cook's efforts to find a passage had failed. Obituaries of the explorer were soon printed in the newspapers, and during the month a few additional details about the voyage reached the press. Apart from his official letter to the Admiralty, Clerke had also sent an account of the voyage to a friend in England, which was read at the Royal Society on 12 January; and by this means the newspapers knew within a fortnight that Cook had spent seven months on the northwest coast of America, searching in vain for a passage.

It was not until July that a detailed account of the voyage appeared, when an anonymous narrative was printed in *The London Magazine*, with a map by Thomas Kitchin. Although it contained some errors which were corrected in a later issue after Cook's ships had returned to England, the article gave a reasonably accurate account of the voyage. The writer regretted that neither Cook nor the Spaniards had examined closely that stretch of the northwest coast where the entrances of Aguilar and Fuca were thought to lie, but he presumed that Clerke had searched that area in 1779, since the explorations of the previous year had shown the futility of trying to make further progress

through Bering Strait. On the other hand, a pamphlet writer at this time thought that Clerke would attempt to pass through Bering Strait and return by way of the Northeast Passage; while Richard Pickersgill believed, despite his own chastening experiences in northern waters, that the sea towards the pole would be found clear enough to allow a navigable passage, and that Clerke would sail through it back to England.¹

After the expedition returned in October 1780 by the less sensational route around the Cape, additional details appeared in the newspapers, though not all were accurate. (One paper contained a long account of the manner in which Cook had been murdered in Kamchatka!)² At first, greatest interest was centred on the circumstances of Cook's death, but it was not long before Daines Barrington passed judgment on the geographical significance of the voyage. In 1781 his tracts of a few years earlier on northern navigation were republished in a volume of *Miscellanies*, together with an annotated translation of a journal kept by Mourelle, a pilot on the Spanish discovery expedition along the northwest coast of America in 1775. In his preface to the volume Barrington pointed out that the attempts by Cook's ships to sail north of Bering Strait had been made at the very time (late summer) when the river ice was floating out to sea, and forming temporary fields of great extent near the land. But he admitted that even if a passage did exist so far north, obstruction from ice would make it impracticable; and the unavailing efforts of Cook and Clerke to find a way through the ice clearly convinced most geographers that there was no passage through Bering Strait. Nor did the experiences of Pickersgill and Young in Davis Strait suggest that further attempts in that region would meet with any success. The complete failure of so ambitious and elaborately planned a project had a depressing

¹ These accounts and opinions are to be found in *The London Magazine*, XLIX (July 1780), pp. 307-12; *Remarks and Conjectures on the Voyage of the Ships Resolution and Discovery* (London, 1780), p. 10; A Sea Officer [Richard Pickersgill], *A Concise Account of Voyages for Discovery of a North-West Passage* (London, 1782), pp. 66-7.

² *The Gazeteer*, 17 Oct. 1780.

effect which the publication of the unauthorized accounts of the voyage by Rickman and Ellis did nothing to dispel, for the maps printed in their books showed a discouragingly solid coastline stretching from northern California to Bering Strait.

In 1784 the official three-volume account of the voyage based on the journals of Cook and King was published, and despite its price of £4 14s. 6d. sold well.¹ Now, for the first time a description of Hearne's journey, so telling an argument against any expectation of finding a passage in temperate latitudes, could be read; and Cook's withering comments on the Fuca and Fonte narratives. The Spanish explorations described by Mourelle, and the revelation of Hearne's great trek across the continent, made Cook's inability to explore parts of the coastline north of Cape Flattery seem comparatively unimportant, and attention turned away from the question of the Northwest Passage, and focused instead on another aspect of Cook's last voyage. In his *Account of the Russian Discoveries* published in 1780 Coxe had described in some detail the voyages of Russian traders venturing eastward from Kamchatka after Bering's second voyage. In crazy vessels held together by leather thongs they had reached the Aleutian and Fox islands, Kodiak and Unalaska, in search of the sea otter and seal; and although losses from storm, disease and native attacks were heavy, the profits the survivors reaped from the valuable furs they brought back were high. In their narratives of Cook's expedition Rickman and Ellis confirmed the ease with which furs could be obtained from the natives of the northwest coast (Ellis, for example, wrote that in Prince William Sound the natives would trade a skin worth ninety or a hundred dollars for half a dozen blue beads);² and with the publication of the official account of the voyage interest sharp-

¹ See *The Monthly Review*, LXX (June 1784), p. 474: 'We remember not a circumstance like what has happened on this occasion. On the third day after publication, a copy was not to be met with in the hands of the bookseller; and, to our certain knowledge, six, seven, eight, and even ten guineas, have since been offered for a sett.'

² William Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage . . . in search of a Northwest Passage between the Continents of Asia and America* (London, 1782), I, p. 243.

ened. In the third volume King noted that the best sea otter skins fetched more than a hundred dollars each at Canton, and he suggested that the East India Company factors there should send two ships to Cook's River to trade for furs. After collecting these they should head southward, 'and trace the coast with great accuracy from the latitude of 56° to 50° , the space from which we were driven out of sight of land by contrary winds. It should here be remarked, that I consider the purchase of skins, in this expedition, merely as a secondary object, for defraying the expence.'¹ This was a counsel of perfection, since no commercial enterprise could be expected to forego the opportunities of profit that the northwest coast offered, for the sake of settling geographical speculation; and mercantile reaction to King's report notably ignored the latter part of his suggestion.

Nevertheless, by the mid 'eighties the air was full of plans and rumours of expeditions to the northwest coast of America from Britain, France, Spain and the newly independent United States of America. And first to reach that remote coast were the fur traders. The quest for beaver had drawn men from the Atlantic almost to within sight of the Rockies, and the maritime traders in their turn were not slow in responding to the lure of the coveted sea otter skins. In 1785 one trading ship reached the coast; the next year six; and by 1792 there were more than twenty plying a hazardous though generally profitable trade along the coast from Nootka northward.² Commerce, not exploration, was the objective; but as these vessels pried into bays and sailed through channels that Cook had never seen, their commanders (some of whom had sailed with Cook on his last voyage) began to query the great explorer's conclusions about the voyages of Juan de Fuca and Bartholomew de Fonte, and their casual surveys and observations raised once again—and for the last time—the possibility that a passage might exist in temperate latitudes.

¹ King, *Voyage to Pacific Ocean*, III, p. 440.

² Details of these ships are to be found in F. W. Howay, 'A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785-1794', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd Series, XXIV (1930), pp. 111-34.

Of the six ships on the coast in 1786, four had been fitted out in India or Canton, and the other two had sailed the fourteen thousand miles from Britain. Two of the vessels from India, commanded by James Strange, were part of a venture operating in close association with the East India Company, which held (together with the moribund South Sea Company) sole rights of British trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. The instructions given Strange seemed to fulfil the conditions suggested by James King, since they stated that 'The Principal purposes for which We mean this Expedition are in the first Instance, Exploring for the benefit of Navigation, and Secondly with a View to Establish a new Channel of Commerce with the Northwest Coast of America'.¹ But Strange's written sailing orders, with their proposal that he should range along the American coast, through Bering Strait, and on towards the pole, were both impracticable and misleading. On the voyage itself the order of priorities set out in his instructions was reversed, and the expedition differed in no way from the other trading ventures on the coast. Like other captains, however, Strange was well aware of the alleged existence of straits along the coast, and when he discovered and named Queen Charlotte Sound in latitude 51° N. he thought that it was probably Fonte's entrance, although his trading activities prevented him from making a thorough examination.²

The two ships which arrived on the northwest coast that year from England were commanded by Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon, both of whom had sailed with Cook on his last voyage. The expedition had been fitted out by an association of merchants formed the previous year in England, named the King George's Sound Company. This company, headed by Richard Etches, submitted a plan of its intentions to the East India Company, and obtained from it a licence to trade on the northwest coast. Among the objectives of its first expedition, Etches

¹ Instructions to James Strange, 7 Dec. 1785. East India Company Archives, Home Series, Misc. 494/5, p. 423.

² James Strange, 'A Narrative of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America'. *Ibid.*, Misc. 800/1, p. 98.

informed the East India Company, would be 'a further attempt to discover a North West Passage';¹ but the subsequent course of the two ships provides no evidence that the commanders were given any instructions regarding discovery. The expedition, like that commanded by Strange, was primarily a trading venture, and the attitude of Etches and his associates on questions of exploration appears to have differed little from that of the merchants who had supported Dobbs in 1748: if a promise to seek the passage would improve their chances of being granted trading privileges, then it would be made; but in so vague a form as to commit them to no definite action or expense.

Portlock and Dixon traded on the northwest coast for two seasons, and wintered, as Cook's expedition had done, at the Sandwich Islands. Both captains published accounts of the voyage after their return to England. Portlock's narrative contained few observations of geographical interest, and although he entered Cook Inlet he turned back when about fifty miles short of the point reached by Cook. Dixon, on the other hand, made a discovery of some importance after he left Portlock in 1787. While trading along the coast between latitudes 51° N. and 55° N. he came to the conclusion that the land there was a group of islands, and not part of the continent at all. Dixon only sailed one third of the way up the channel (Hecate Strait) separating those islands from what he assumed was the mainland, but he was quick to point out the significance of his discovery. In the introduction to the published account of his voyage he rejected Mourelle's assertion that the Spanish explorations of 1775 had shown that Fonte's archipelago and strait did not exist, for the situation of the newly-discovered Queen Charlotte Islands,

¹ Minutes of Court of Directors of East India Company, 29 April 1785. *Ibid.*, *Misc.* 494/5, p. 360. Etches gave details of where he considered the passage might be found: 'as there are a number of inlets in Prince William's Sound, and Cook's River, that time would not permit Captain Cook to explore—it is very probable that in prosecuting a Trade in those parts, that some very essential discoveries may be made and perhaps a communication carried on to Hudson's or Baffin's Bay'. This document, and others concerned with the voyage, are printed in Vincent Harlow and Frederick Madden (eds.), *British Colonial Developments 1784-1834 Select Documents*, (Oxford, 1953), pp. 21-8.

Dixon contended, 'evidently shows that they are the Archipelago of St. Lazarus, and consequently near the Strait of De Fonte'.¹

The most important discovery of the 1787 season still remained to be made. The traders had so far kept north of Nootka, but in June William Barkley arrived on the northwest coast in the *Imperial Eagle* and sailed southeast from Nootka as far as Cape Flattery, where his wife entered in her diary:

In the afternoon, to our great astonishment, we arrived off a large opening extending to the eastward, the entrance of which appeared to be about four leagues wide, and remained about that width as far as the eye could see, with a clear westerly horizon, which my husband immediately recognized as the long lost strait of Juan de Fuca, and to which he gave the name of the original discoverer.²

Barkley did not enter the strait, but kept south along the coast and then bore away to Macao, from where news of this apparent confirmation of the account attributed to the old Greek pilot soon reached England, and was an important factor in the revival of hope that a navigable Northwest Passage might yet be found.

In England, meanwhile, the association of merchants that had fitted out the expedition of Portlock and Dixon in 1785 had sent out two other vessels the next year: the *Prince of Wales*, commanded by James Colnett, a lieutenant in the navy who had sailed as a midshipman with Cook on his second circumnavigation, and the tiny sixty-five ton *Princess Royal*, commander Charles Duncan, a master in the navy. The ships arrived on the northwest coast in June 1787, and spent two seasons there, wintering at the Sandwich Islands. A study of Colnett's

¹ [William Beresford], *A Voyage round the World 1785-1788 by Captain George Dixon* (London, 1789), introduction (by Dixon), p. xiv. The French explorer, Galaup de la Pérouse, who had been on the northwest coast the year before in command of a French naval expedition, had also sailed about thirty leagues up Hecate Strait. However, his ship was lost with all hands in the south Pacific shortly afterwards, and although his journals and charts reached France safely they were not published until 1798, and consequently were not known to the traders and explorers who followed him.

² Quoted in W. Kaye Lamb, 'The Mystery of Mrs. Barkley's Diary', *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, VI (1942), p. 43.

journal shows that this venture also was essentially concerned with trade, and that no diversions for exploration were considered. Despite this restriction, the number of sketch maps in the journal is proof that Colnett conscientiously charted the regions he frequented in his search for furs, and near the end of his journal he made some revealing comments on the nature of the coast near the Queen Charlotte Islands. There, he wrote, a navigable route 'might not improperly be conjectured to run to Hudson's Bay from the Depth of water, width of the Channel and tending to the NE as far as the Eye could reach'; and he concluded with the observation, 'It's a doubt with me if ever I have seen the Coast of America at all'.¹

No journal of Duncan's is known to exist, and most of the information concerning his voyage comes from a letter he wrote to George Dixon in 1791, which the latter subsequently published.² In the letter Duncan described his route after separating from the *Prince of Wales* in 1788. The *Princess Royal* traded along the coast past Nootka until on 15 August it anchored inside the strait of Juan de Fuca off an Indian village called Claaset. Duncan's sketch of the entrance of the strait was published early in 1790. On it, Cook's Cape Flattery was renamed Cape Claaset, and near it was marked Pinnacle Rock, a reminder of that 'exceeding high Pinacle' which two centuries earlier Fuca was reported to have told Lok was the distinguishing feature of the entrance to the strait he had discovered. The map showed the tide setting out of the inlet, and a note stated: 'The Indians of Claaset said that they knew not of any land to the Eastward; and that it was Aass toopulse, which signifies a Great Sea. They pointed that the Sea ran a great way up, to the Northward; and down to the Southward'.³ The Indians were no doubt referring

¹ 'A Voyage to the N.W. Side of America by J. Colnett'. Journal of James Colnett, Adm 55/146, f. 232r. An inscription on the fly-leaf noting that Colnett presented the journal to Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty, explains how the log of a trading vessel comes to be among the Admiralty records.

² George Dixon, *Further Remarks on the Voyages of John Meares* (London, 1791), pp. 20-32.

³ Charles Duncan, 'Sketch of the Entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. 15th August 1788'; published by Alexander Dalrymple, 14 Jan. 1790.

to the extension of the waters of the Fuca strait south into Puget Sound, and north into the Strait of Georgia; but geographers in England identified the sea described by the Indians as the North Sea discovered by Fuca in 1592, and the discoveries he made on the Pacific coast made Duncan himself a firm, even fanatical, believer in the existence of a Northwest Passage.

On 26 August 1788, eleven days after Duncan had entered the Fuca strait, the American trading vessel *Washington* commanded by Robert Gray was cruising off the same stretch of coast, and the trend of the land and current convinced the crew that a strait lay nearby. The following March they were able to confirm this, for the *Washington* entered the strait for a distance of twenty-five miles; farther than any other vessel had ventured. Stormy weather then forced the ship back, but the mate noted that 'the straits appeared to extend their breadth a little way above our present situation and form a Large sea stretching to the east and no land to obstruct the view as far as the eye could reach'. Exaggerated reports of this voyage reached Britain within eighteen months, and added to the growing controversy and confusion about the significance of the discoveries being made on the distant northwest coast. Other entries in the logs kept on board the *Washington* show that its officers placed great faith in the accounts of Fuca and Fonte, and in May 1789 they concluded that in Dixon Entrance they had discovered Fonte's famous opening.¹

The reasoning of the traders on the northwest coast is not difficult to follow. Fonte was said to have discovered an archipelago in latitude 53° N., and beyond it a great river. Recent explorations had shown that the Queen Charlotte Islands stretched across the latitude assigned to the St Lazarus archipelago, and that on the mainland a large river ran into the sea.²

¹ For the journal entries on the Fuca and Fonte straits see F. W. Howay (ed.), *Voyages of the Columbia to the Northwest Coast 1787-1790 and 1790-1793* (Boston, Massachusetts Historical Society, LXXIX, 1941), pp. 73, 91, 99.

² For example, when Dixon's ship was in latitude 52°57' N. in the summer of 1787, the tide drove out large patches of grass and pieces of wood from the shore, and all the signs seemed to point to the existence of a large river nearby. See Beresford, *Voyage round the World by Dixon*, p. 216.

This, it was assumed, must be Río los Reyes. The same argument applied with even more force to the strait of Juan de Fuca. Purchas told how the Greek pilot had found a strait between latitudes 47° N. and 48° N., and now Barkley, Duncan and Gray had all discovered an opening only slightly north of that latitude which seemed to lead into a great inland sea.

The voyages of the fur traders had shown that Cook's surmise that in 1778 he was passing the mainland between Nootka and Mount St Elias was probably incorrect. Among the captains of these vessels hopes of a passage rose as they viewed the great entrances in the coast in the very latitudes where they had long been indicated on the maps of the theoretical geographers; but to explore those gulfs and inlets was, as they were at pains to emphasize, a task completely beyond the scope of their trading operations. Their accounts and maps lay before the government and public in Britain, and it was from there that further exploration must be set forward. It was perhaps not altogether a coincidence that the geographer who took up the quest most eagerly was Cook's old opponent, Alexander Dalrymple.

Dalrymple, at this time hydrographer to the East India Company, had once been an ardent believer in the existence of a great southern continent.¹ In 1768 Cook had been given command of the *Endeavour* in preference to him, and by 1775 had demonstrated the fallacy of his theories. Although Dalrymple's main interest had always been in the south Pacific and the East Indies (as a glance at his prodigious output of charts, views and memoirs will show), his highly developed geographical curiosity, and the extent to which the East India Company was involved in the new trading operations north of Nootka, turned his attention in the late 'eighties to the northwest coast of America. The fact that Cook's opinions on the possibility of a Northwest

¹ For Dalrymple's career in general see a partly autobiographical memoir printed in *The Naval Chronicle*, XXXV (1816), pp. 177-201. For his theories about the southern continent see Beaglehole, *Journals of James Cook*, I, General Introduction, pp. ci-cvi; Harlow, *Founding of Second British Empire*, pp. 34-8, 47-8.

Passage along that coast now seemed likely to be proved wrong would make the prospect of research into the geography and commercial potentialities of the region all the more tempting to Dalrymple. The first hint of his interest in the expeditions trading along the coast was given in a letter of November 1788 from Barrington to Douglas, in which he wrote that Dalrymple had informed him that British fur traders had discovered a large island off the Pacific coast of North America between latitudes 52° N. and 54° N.¹ The traders were Dixon and Portlock, during whose voyage the Queen Charlotte Islands had been discovered; and Barrington's letter shows that Dalrymple was receiving early information about the ventures to the Pacific coast, because the two ships had returned to Britain only a few weeks earlier. He corresponded with Cox, a British merchant at Canton who was one of the chief promoters of the fur trading expeditions, and from this time forward also worked closely with Dixon, whose practical seamanship and knowledge of the coast made him an invaluable assistant to Dalrymple, whose enthusiastic pertinacity and flashes of insight into geographical problems were marred by a tendency to subordinate facts to theories, and a mulish reluctance to abandon lost causes. The account of Dixon's voyage was published in 1789, and reviewers were quick to note the resemblance of the Queen Charlotte Islands to Fonte's Archipelago of St Lazarus.²

Coincidental with the publication of the Dixon account appeared a pamphlet by Dalrymple entitled *A Plan for Promoting the Fur-Trade*, and a month or two later he issued a map of the Arctic regions, together with an accompanying memoir. In 1789 and 1790 Dalrymple also published a series of sketches and maps drawn by traders from the northwest coast, including Duncan's chart of the entrance to the strait of Juan de Fuca. These publications reveal Dalrymple's growing interest in the geography of the northwest coast, and also his conviction that the new

¹ Barrington to Douglas, 18 Nov. 1788. B.M.Eg.MSS. 2185, f. 168r.

² See *The Critical Review*, LXVII (March 1789), p. 184; *The Monthly Review*, LXXX (June 1789), p. 509.

discoveries would bring marked commercial advantages to Britain, and in particular to his own employers, the East India Company. As a friend of Samuel Wegg, now Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Dalrymple was allowed access to the maps and journals in the archives of that company, and he used his unique position to link the explorations on the east and west sides of the continent. Although several navigators on the Pacific coast had suggested that the straits they had discovered might lead to Hudson Bay, Dalrymple was the first to study in detail the explorations of the Bay earlier in the century, and to indicate where on its western coast the exit of such a strait might lie.

Dalrymple examined with special care the Indian maps brought to England by Moses Norton in the 1760s. They seemed to show that Repulse Bay did not block the way to the north, but that there was a passage between the northwest part of Hudson Bay (explored only by Middleton) and the polar sea. He therefore omitted Middleton's Frozen Strait—cause of so much dispute forty years earlier—from his *Map of the Lands around the North-Pole*, and commented in the explanatory memoir that his examination of what maps there were of the northwest coast of Hudson Bay made him suspect that it was composed of islands, though he hastened to add that 'what I have here said, must not be misunderstood to imply, that I believe, or even suppose, there is a Sea-Communication from Hudson's Bay to the Pacifick Ocean: There is no circumstantial report to countenance such an opinion'.¹ In arriving at this last conclusion Dalrymple was inevitably influenced by Hearne's testimony, but he queried the longitudes and latitudes of the explorer. By comparing Hearne's longitudes with those of Philip Turnor, the Hudson's Bay Company surveyor who had returned to England in 1788 after ten years in the Bay, Dalrymple was able to show that Hearne had overestimated the distances he had travelled,

¹ Alexander Dalrymple, *A Plan for Promoting the Fur-Trade, and Securing it to This Country, by Uniting the Operations of the East-India and Hudson's-Bay Companies* (London, 1789), pp. 5-6.

and that his longitudes, based on dead reckoning, were consequently too far west. It seemed possible that Hearne's latitudes were also incorrect. The quadrant he had taken with him on his expedition to the Coppermine River had been smashed on the return journey, and even before this accident he had given only one observation of latitude. This suggested either that Hearne was not certain how to use the quadrant, or that the instrument itself was unreliable. Dalrymple's map accordingly showed a much greater extent of unexplored country between Hudson Bay and the Pacific than Hearne had supposed, but on the other hand he calculated (correctly) that the sea discovered by Hearne lay in latitude 68° N., not latitude 72° N. This made the chances of a navigable passage through that sea not quite as remote as they had appeared immediately after Cook's final voyage.

Dalrymple next turned to the recent discoveries on the northwest coast of America, and pointed out that although it was twelve hundred miles from Hudson Bay to the coast seen by British traders between latitudes 51° N. and 53° N., it was far from certain that those shores were part of the American mainland. Dalrymple agreed with Dixon, who considered that the lands discovered north of Nootka were islands, and that they bore a marked resemblance to those described by Fonte; and Dixon's report of a large river near the latitude assigned to the Río los Reyes seemed to be confirmed by the journal of another trader, James Hanna, that reached Dalrymple at this time. In the same memoir the geographer set out new evidence which he considered proved that Fonte had lived at the time stated in the letter of 1708; but the most compelling reason for the revival of interest in the account was the realization that the coast of northwest America appeared to comply far more accurately with the description given in the Fonte narrative than with the hitherto revered opinions of Cook.

The motive behind Dalrymple's painstaking attempts to show the probability of a passage through or around the continent was his desire to bring about a union of the East India and

Hudson's Bay companies. His main argument in favour of some form of amalgamation was that China offered a vast market for furs of every variety, and that the experience of the Hudson's Bay Company traders in collecting furs ought to be combined with the facilities the East India Company factors in Canton possessed for selling them. Such a scheme, Dalrymple informed the Directors of the East India Company, would be infinitely preferable to their 'left-handed policy' of granting licences to trade on the northwest coast to private merchants, whose haphazard methods would either destroy the trade or lose it to foreign competitors.¹ Much of the beaver imported by the Hudson's Bay Company was already exported to China, Dalrymple explained, but by means of the Russian market. This was a long and roundabout route which a recent suspension of trade between China and Russia threatened to cut altogether,² and Dalrymple's alternative proposal was that the East India Company ships trading to Canton should, after unloading there, sail for the American coast, and take on board furs collected at a Hudson's Bay Company fort on that coast.

This project for a direct exploitation of the China market depended on the discovery of a waterway between Hudson Bay and the northwest coast along which the Hudson's Bay Company could establish posts and pass furs to the coast for shipment to China. If necessary, the route could be used in reverse, and furs from the west sent to Hudson Bay for rapid shipment to Europe. Dalrymple hoped that this essential communication might be found by way of Chesterfield Inlet, or one of the other openings on the west coast of the Bay which, he believed, prob-

¹ Memorandum, n.d. East India Company Archives, Home Series, Misc. 494/5, p. 429.

² For further details see W. E. Stevens, *The Northwest Fur Trade 1763-1800* (University of Illinois, 1928), pp. 147-50, and also two memoranda, the first of which appears to have been written by Dalrymple, among the Colonial Office Papers: C.O. 42/21, ff. 56-62; C.O. 42/66, last item. These show that of furs worth £200,000 to £250,000 brought into Britain between 1775 and 1777, £30,000 worth had been exported to St Petersburg and sold there for £43,000. The Russians in turn re-exported these to China at a price further enhanced. The second memorandum put the proportion of furs sent to Russia at a higher level; as much as one quarter of the beaver skins.

ably connected with Lake Dobaunt, and thence with the great Lake Arathapescow.¹ The Indian maps in the Company archives appeared to show that this lake, which Hearne had been informed was four hundred miles long, communicated with Hudson Bay, and Dalrymple tentatively identified it as the Lake de Fonte described in the Fonte letter. If this theory were correct, then there was an easy route from the Pacific to the lake, and probably a continuous waterway to Hudson Bay. This route was in some respects similar to the waterway being sought by the outrunners of the Canadian fur traders who were forcing their way westward across the continent; but whereas realists like Henry and Mackenzie were seeking a way for their birch canoes, in itself a difficult enough quest, the ebullient geographer in London was dreaming of a coast-to-coast waterway navigable for oceanic vessels. Even Dalrymple did not state that such a route definitely existed, but he felt strongly that the possibility should be investigated without delay; and his efforts in this direction were assisted by the activities of one of the most controversial figures among the maritime fur traders on the northwest coast, John Meares.

Meares is best known for the discreditable part he played in the deterioration of Anglo-Spanish relations at the time of the Nootka Sound crisis, and the inflated importance attached at the time to his evidence gained his writings an unusually large measure of publicity. After leaving the navy in 1783 with the rank of lieutenant, Meares had obtained command of a British ship which was being fitted out in India for a trading voyage to the northwest coast of America. The venture was notable for a disastrous winter spent in Prince William Sound, where Meares lost twenty-three of his crew through scurvy, and was found in sad plight the next summer by Portlock and Dixon. However, Meares returned to the northwest coast with the vessels *Felice Adventurer* and *Iphigenia Nubiana*, the latter commanded by

¹ Considerable confusion was caused at this period by the assumption that the lake which Hearne discovered in 1772 and called Arathapescow was the Lake Athabaska of the Canadian traders: but it was Great Slave Lake.

William Douglas. Nominally owned by Juan Cawalho of Macao and flying the Portuguese flag, the ships in fact belonged to Etches' company (renamed The Associated Merchants trading to the Northwest Coast of America), and adopted the subterfuge of Portuguese ownership to evade the monopoly rights of the East India Company. The expedition sailed for the American coast in 1788, and established a small trading base at Nootka, where the *Iphigenia Nubiana* was joined the next year by the two ships belonging to the company commanded by Colnett and Duncan.

In the summer of 1789 the three vessels, together with a small schooner built on the coast, were captured by a force of Spaniards. This seizure, although not specifically authorized by the Spanish government, formed the climax of Spanish pretensions to dominion over the entire Pacific coast of America. When Meares reached England in 1790 he found that the dispute had not yet been made public, although the British and Spanish governments had been negotiating about the matter for two or three months; but a series of tendentious memorials composed by Meares with the intention of extracting the maximum advantage to his company from the altercation led to a hardening of attitude by the cabinet, and to the flaring of anti-Spanish passions through the country.¹ At the end of the year, after the two nations had come perilously near war before reaching agreement in October, Meares' account of his voyages was published, and this bulky volume resulted in renewed controversy about the significance of the discoveries which had been made on the northwest coast of America.

The main line of Meares' argument was the by now familiar one that along the coastline which Cook had not explored there had been recently discovered those islands and straits described by Fuca and Fonte. Meares himself had reached Nootka on his second voyage in May 1788, and from there sailed southward

¹ See John M. Norris, 'The Policy of the British Cabinet in the Nootka Crisis', *English Historical Review*, LXX (1955), pp. 569-76, for a discussion of Meares' influence on British policy in the summer of 1790.

along a coast unexamined by Cook or (Meares asserted) any other navigator.¹ At the end of June he discovered an opening which he supposed was the strait of Juan de Fuca, and on his return northward sent his first mate Robert Duffin in the longboat to explore it and trade with the natives. These attacked Duffin's men and the boat was forced to return, but, wrote Meares: 'She had sailed near thirty leagues up the strait, and at that distance from the sea it was about fifteen leagues broad, with a clear horizon stretching to the East for 15 leagues more. Such an extraordinary circumstance filled us with strange conjectures as to the extremity of this strait, which we concluded, at all events, could not be at any great distance from Hudson's Bay'.² If this statement that the strait extended forty-five leagues to the east is taken at face value, then the nearest part of Hudson Bay would still be a thousand miles distant; but Duffin's own journal, which Meares printed as an appendix, shows that the longboat sailed only eleven leagues up the strait. Nor is it likely that its crew would have been able to see more than a few miles ahead from their lowly vantage point; certainly not the fifteen leagues claimed by Meares! These inconsistencies do not inspire confidence in Meares' veracity, nor does the fact that the only credit he gave Barkley for his discovery of the Fuca strait in 1787 was seemingly inadvertent.

Although in 1788 Meares cautioned William Douglas in the *Iphigenia Nubiana* against diverting his energies in exploration —'Commerce is our view' he reminded his subordinate³—in his published account two years later he made much of the discovery by Douglas of a large group of islands between latitudes

¹ Meares mentioned Barkley's discovery of the Fuca strait in 1787 only in his preliminary 'Observations on the Probable Existence of a North West Passage', where, in contradiction to his statements in the body of the narrative, he mentioned that Barkley's boat-crew 'discovered the extraordinary straits of John de Fuca'. John Meares, *Voyages made in the Years 1788 and 1789, from China to the North West Coast of America* (London, 1790), p. Iv.

² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³ This part of Douglas' instructions was omitted by Meares from Appendix V of his *Voyages* (where he published the rest of them), but is given in F. W. Howay (ed.), *The Journal of Captain James Colnett aboard the Argonaut 1789-1791* (Toronto, The Champlain Society, XXVI, 1940), pp. 35-6.

51° N. and 54°30' N. This group (actually the Queen Charlotte Islands) Meares imagined to be the Archipelago of St Lazarus, and he maintained that his explorations and those of Douglas had shown that the accounts of Fuca and Fonte were probably true, and that through one of the openings on the northwest coast stretched a channel to Hudson Bay or the southern part of Baffin Bay. In the voyage of the American trader *Washington* Meares found further confirmation of his theories. The route of Gray's vessel up the strait of Juan de Fuca for a short distance has been described earlier, and the exaggerated form the voyage took in various statements made by Meares amply demonstrates the unscrupulous way in which he perverted facts to fit his own theories. He first mentioned the voyage in July 1790, when he asserted that the *Washington* 'went up de Fonti's Strait and passing thro' a Sea came out at the Strait of Juan de Fuca'. In a memorial by Meares at the end of the month the track of the vessel was reversed, and in the account given in his *Voyages* at the end of the year further details were added. Meares now alleged that Gray had received his information about the Fuca strait from him, and that the trader had then passed through the strait into a sea 'of great extent' to the eastward before returning to the Pacific through a passage farther north along the coast.¹

A significant reminder of the sceptical attitude of many in England towards works of theoretical geography was provided by the critical reaction to Meares' volume by reviewers, and also by George Dixon, whom Meares had incautiously criticized for not rendering more ready assistance in Prince William Sound in 1787.² Dixon was suspicious of Meares' account and map of the voyage of the *Washington*, and fiercely critical of the way in which he casually altered the latitudes and longitudes of coasts,

¹ For the three different versions of the voyage of the *Washington* given by Meares see F. W. Howay (ed.), *The Dixon-Meares Controversy* (Toronto, 1929), p. 14; Meares, *Voyages*, p. lvii.

² See *The Monthly Review*, New Series, IV (March 1791), p. 257; *The Critical Review*, New Arrangement, I (Jan. 1791), p. 4; George Dixon, *Remarks on the Voyages of John Meares* (London, 1790).

rivers and lakes to suit his own theories; a habit which meant that the same feature was given a different position from map to map in his volume. Nevertheless, Dixon's own views on the geography of the northwest coast reveal the extent to which Cook's opinions were being modified, and are the more noteworthy because of his censure of the inflated claims of Meares. Although he doubted whether a navigable passage would be found south of latitude 72° N., Dixon was certain that east of Nootka and the Fuca strait stretched a sea of unknown extent, and he hoped that this would be explored by a British naval expedition.¹

Dalrymple and Meares agreed that a passage to the Pacific might be found by two possible routes: from the northwest of Hudson Bay, through Hearne's sea, and into the Pacific at or near Cook's River; or through an inlet on the west coast of Hudson Bay, and along the rivers and lakes of the interior to the Pacific coast or into the great inland sea suspected to lie east of Nootka. Advocates of both routes were confronted with a serious difficulty, because although by this period (as Dalrymple had written) the distance between Hudson Bay and those stretches of the northwest coast sighted by Cook was as well known as any equivalent space in Europe, the position, extent and navigability of the lakes and rivers between the two coasts was far from certain. The only information that Dalrymple and other geographers could obtain on this vital point came from the itinerant fur traders of the interior, and the most inquisitive of these in the period before 1790 was Peter Pond.²

Pond was a New Englander of combative disposition who

¹ Dixon, *Further Remarks*, pp. 77-8.

² For an examination of Pond's maps and geographical theories see Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley, 1918), pp. 36-46. I have been unable to obtain a copy of H. R. Wagner's *Peter Pond, Fur Trader and Explorer* (New Haven, Yale University Library, Western Historical Series No. 2, 1955); but the contents of that monograph are summarized in Carl I. Wheat, *Mapping the Transmississippi West*, I (San Francisco, The Institute of Historical Cartography, 1957), pp. 169-73.

since 1775 had traded and explored in the country northwest of Lake Superior. In the spring of 1785 he sent Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton of Quebec a memorial on behalf of the North West Company, in which he urged that the British government should help the Company's fur traders to establish posts as far as the Pacific coast, and thus stop the trade falling into the hands of the Russians and Americans. With the memorial Pond enclosed a map he had drawn of the northwest. The most noticeable features of this map are the positions of 'Lake Araubaska' (the modern Lake Athabaska) and the polar sea.¹ Athabaska is shown only slightly north of its correct latitude, but the longitude of its western end is 132° W. instead of 112° W.; that is, in roughly the same longitude as Nootka, almost seven hundred miles nearer the Pacific than it actually is. Hearne's polar sea is marked on the map in latitude 65° N.; seven degrees south of its position according to Hearne, and three degrees south of its true position. Although Pond knew the region better than any other white man, in the construction of maps he was handicapped by his complete lack of training. There is no indication that he could make an astronomical observation, and his reliance on dead reckoning led to absurdly inaccurate maps. Pond was one of the last of the old explorers, men tough in body and mind, but who often returned from the wilderness unable to represent accurately in map form where they had been or what they had seen. The maps they did produce distracted as much as they assisted. The northwest was soon to be reached by a different school of explorer, versed in the intricacies of the scientific cartography that had developed in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Alexander Mackenzie, who returned to England after his expedition of 1789 to study cartography and navigation, Philip Turnor, David Thompson: these were the men who, with their sextants and chronometers, not only explored but surveyed, and whose journeys were thereby made im-

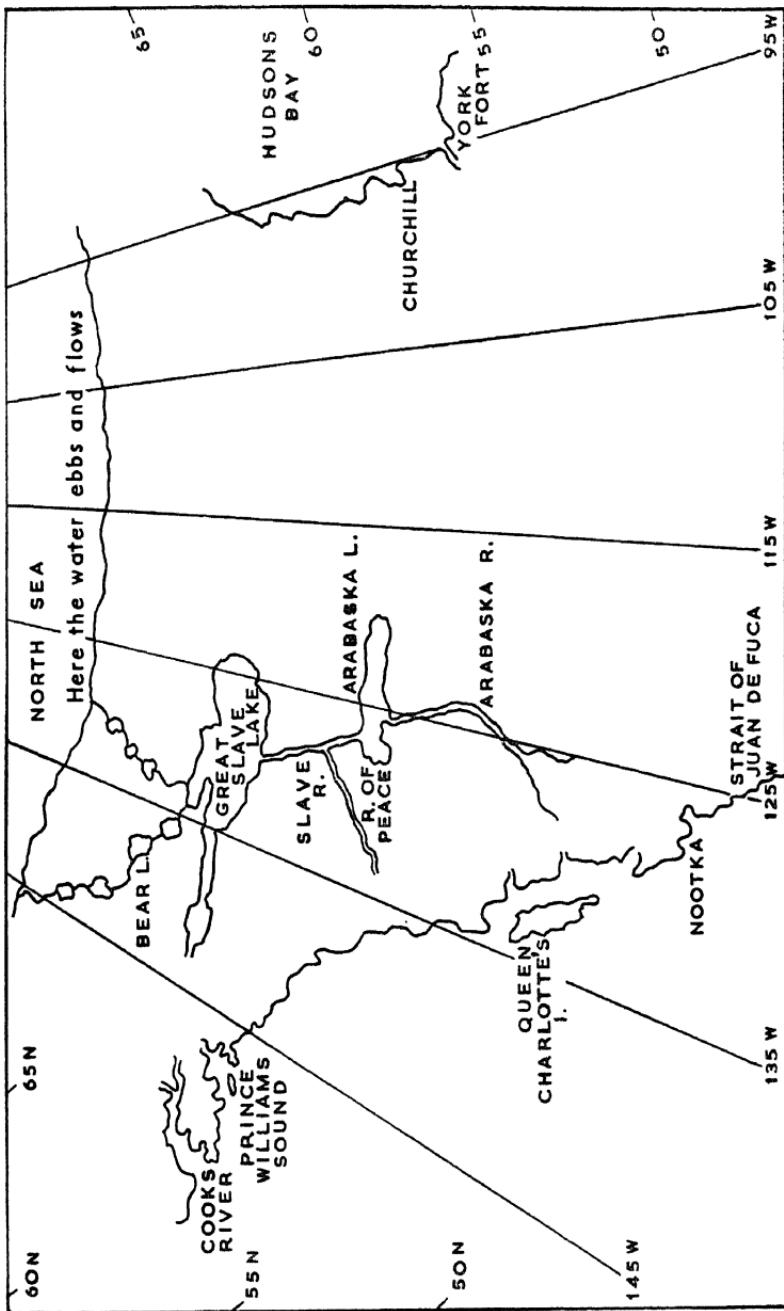
¹ The memorial was enclosed in a letter from Hamilton to Sydney (Secretary of State for the Home Department), 9 April 1785. C.O. 42/47, f. 329r. There is a copy of the map in Davidson, *North West Company*, p. 32.

measurably more valuable to those who followed. But in the decade before their coming it was Peter Pond, semi-literate, at times an outcast because of his murderous deeds against rivals in the fur trade, whose feats of travel and endurance in the northwest held the attention of traders and geographers.

In 1785 or 1786 Pond returned to the interior with the intention of finding a communication between Lake Athabaska and Cook's River, and news of his discoveries reached England in the winter of 1789-90. Among the papers of Sir Joseph Banks there is a letter dated 4 November 1789 from one of his correspondents in Quebec, J. M. Nooth, who informed Banks that 'a very singular Person by the Name of Pond' had arrived in Quebec claiming to have discovered in northwest America a lake (Great Slave Lake) almost as large as Britain which probably communicated with Cook's River or Prince William Sound.¹ Pond said that he had met Indians near this lake who had seen Cook's ships, and possessed articles apparently manufactured in England. Nooth continued that Pond had presented a map of his discoveries to Lord Dorchester, Governor of Quebec; and this map (dated 6 December 1787) was sent to England, where it still survives.² It is an impressive production which marks Pond's routes and stopping places, and shows the region from Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes to Kamchatka. Its most striking feature is a gigantic Great Slave Lake which stretches from longitude 124° W. to 136° W. (again, about seven hundred miles too far west), and is then marked as continuing still farther westward as a channel, twenty miles across at its narrowest point, to longitude 143° W. and latitude 63° N. Cook's track of 1778 is marked with care, and the unexplored end of the channel or river running out of Great Slave Lake is placed only one hundred and fifty miles distant from Prince William Sound, and two hundred and seventy-five miles from the farthest point reached by Cook in Cook's River. The open ends of that 'river'

¹ Printed in R. H. Dillon, 'Peter Pond and the Overland Route to Cook's Inlet', *Pacific North West Quarterly*, XLII (1951), p. 329.

² It is now classified as C.O. 700 America/49.



Northwest America: after Peter Pond 1787

and of the channel flowing from Great Slave Lake, are shown pointing directly at each other.

More information about Pond's views was given in a letter from Isaac Ogden, then acting clerk of the Crown and later judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Quebec, which his father in London sent under-secretary of state Evan Nepean, one of Dalrymple's associates.¹ Ogden stated that the large river flowing southwest from the Great Slave Lake was definitely Cook's River, and that Pond had met two Indians in 1787 who had come up it from the Pacific and had in their possession a blanket, which they said they had obtained from ships at the mouth of the river. Pond had also told Ogden that the southern shore of the polar sea lay in latitude $68\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N., and Ogden added that although Cook in August 1778 had been stopped by ice in latitude 72° N., if he had waited another month he would have met no obstruction and might have passed along the northern coast of America.

Pond's discoveries, then, seemed to increase the possibility that a navigable passage might be found by both the routes advocated by Dalrymple and other theorists. He asserted, independently of Dalrymple and Meares, that Hearne's sea did not lie as far north as that explorer had estimated, and that it was free from ice in the autumn. Moreover, at the same time as the fur traders moving westward from Hudson Bay and Canada were searching for navigable waterways to the Athabaska region, Pond appeared to have discovered a route from the interior to the Pacific by way of the Great Slave Lake and Cook's River. Much work remained to be done to confirm his discoveries, and to link them with the lakes and rivers to the east, and there were some who doubted Pond's reliability as a cartographer. Ogden thought Pond 'a Gentleman of Observation and Science', and maintained that his latitudes were correct, and his longitudes almost so; but Nooth showed more critical acumen

¹ Isaac Ogden to David Ogden, 7 Nov. 1789, forwarded to Nepean 23 Jan. 1790. C.O. 42/72, pp. 495-8. A long extract from Ogden's letter was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LX (March 1790), pp. 197-9, together with a sketch-map which appears to be a simplified copy of Pond's map of Dec. 1787.

when he told Banks that the longitudes on Pond's map seemed 'to be guesswork and not in any respect accurate enough to be depended upon'. There was, too, an important flaw in Pond's theory; a chagrined Mackenzie discovered that the river from the Great Slave Lake led to the Arctic Ocean and not to the Pacific. However, the first disconcerting rumours of this discovery did not reach England until the end of 1790.¹

With information reaching him every month reporting the discovery of great lakes and rivers in the interior of the continent, identifying parts of the northwest coast as those described in the accounts of Fuca and Fonte, and testifying both to the value of the trade on that coast and to the growing interest of foreign powers in the region, Dalrymple decided that the time had come for more direct pressure on the government and Hudson's Bay Company to convert the haphazard, piecemeal process of exploration and exploitation into a carefully planned project to discover a navigable passage from Atlantic to Pacific, and wrest control of the intervening region from foreign competitors. Three times in the eighteenth century the government sent expeditions to seek the Northwest Passage, and on each occasion the driving force came from an enthusiast who had contacts with geographers, explorers and the government, and who was zealous enough to disregard disappointments and overcome the indifference of those in authority. In 1789 and 1790 it was Dalrymple who received, interpreted and collated reports from every possible source on the geography of the northwest coast of America, and then presented his conclusions to the government and chartered companies. The rough charts drawn by the captains of vessels trading for furs in the sounds of the northwest coast; the visionary maps of Pond away in the far north, obsessed with the problem of reaching the Pacific; the

¹ See letter Holland to Nepean, Quebec 10 Nov. 1790 (now in C.O. 42/72, last section), which reached Nepean 18 Dec. On 2 Jan. 1791 Barrington wrote to Douglas: 'I have dined lately at Enderby's with Mr. Dalrymple who says that Mackenzey found Cook's River to turn to the N: instead of the W: and that he hath proceeded to 70 degrees'. B.M.Eg.MSS. 2186, f. 18.

forgotten Indian sketches of Hudson Bay brought home by Norton many years earlier: all found their way to Dalrymple in his hydrographer's office in the East India Company building in Threadneedle Street. There he pored over the maps, studied the journals of the explorers, and talked to the men recently returned from North America—to Philip Turnor from Hudson Bay, George Dixon and Charles Duncan from the Pacific coast—and always with the thought in mind that if his countrymen discovered a passage from the east to west coast, then the two great chartered companies, with government support, could control the trade of half a continent. This was the counterweight which would keep steady and under profitable control that 'swing to the East' through the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and China which was a feature of British overseas expansion in the second half of the eighteenth century,¹ and for which Dalrymple in his earlier days had done much to prepare the way. It was a vision worthy of a Rhodes, but Dalrymple was a theorist doomed to frustration and disappointment. His plans for British trade and settlement in the south Pacific had come to grief because there was no southern continent; and his scheme for a union of the two companies was impracticable, not only because of the innate conservatism of those who ruled them,² but because across the route from Hudson Bay and Athabaska to the Pacific stretched the great, and as yet largely unknown, barrier of the Rocky Mountains.³

Dalrymple published his memoirs on the fur trade and the geography of the Arctic regions in the early summer of 1789, and in July he and Dixon were pressing the government to send

¹ See Harlow, *Founding of Second British Empire*, I, Ch. III.

² There is no indication that Dalrymple's project had the official blessing of the East India Company, and as late as February 1791 he was still pointing out to the Court of Directors that 'unless we profit by the advantage of our possessions in Hudson's Bay, which would secure us a shorter cut the Americans will certainly beat us out'. East India Company Archives, Home Series, Misc. 494/5, pp. 445-6.

³ Pond probably understood better than anyone else at this period the formidable nature of the barrier, but his 1787 map showed it ending in latitude 62° N. to allow a channel between Great Slave Lake and Cook Inlet.

an expedition to the northwest coast. Dixon wrote to Nepean stressing the urgency of the matter, and told the under-secretary that Dalrymple had received information that the Russians were in possession of Cook's River and Prince William Sound, and that the Spaniards were extending their settlements northward. In addition, there were ships under American, Portuguese and Swedish colours on the coast, and Dixon warned that 'if something is not done and that immediately this Valuable Branch of Commerce will be lost to this Country'.¹ Examination of Meares' manuscript journal, a copy of which reached Dalrymple during the summer of 1789, confirmed the need for swift and purposeful action, and in September Dalrymple appears to have submitted a memorandum to the government giving further details of the proposals first set out in his *Plan for Promoting the Fur-Trade*,² and emphasizing that the discovery of a water-way from the Pacific to the interior would give British traders a mobility that would enable them to acquire complete domination of the fur trade. The trade was capable of indefinite expansion, but was threatened by the increasing number of Spanish and Russian settlements on the coast; and this danger must be countered, urged Dalrymple, by the establishment of a British trading post on the northwest coast.

There is evidence that the government intended to send an expedition to the Pacific coast in 1790 with similar objectives to those proposed by Dalrymple, although to what extent it was influenced by his views on the subject is not certain. In January 1790 the British *charge d'affaires* at Madrid, Anthony Merry, sent the government news of the seizure of British ships at Nootka; the next month the Foreign Secretary, the Duke of Leeds, wrote to Merry that Britain insisted on its right to trade on the northwest coast of America, and make settlements there;³

¹ Dixon to Nepean, 14 July 1789. C.O. 42/72, p. 488.

² The memorandum is in C.O. 42/21, ff. 56-62, and is annotated 'found with papers of Sept. 1789'.

³ Leeds to Merry, 2 Feb. 1790. Printed in W. R. Manning, *The Nootka Sound Controversy*, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1904, Pt. XVI (Washington, 1905), p. 367.

and in March William Grenville at the Home Office (under whose jurisdiction the colonies came in this period) drafted a dispatch to Governor Phillip in New South Wales informing him that the naval sloop *Discovery* and a consort were to form a settlement on the northwest coast of America.¹ They would first call at Port Jackson, and take on board about thirty men selected by the Governor from the New South Wales corps, convicts and overseers, who were to establish a settlement 'for the assistance of his Majesty's subjects in the prosecution of the fur trade from the N.W. coast of America'. This was the plan which Dalrymple and the fur traders had advocated so strenuously, but at the beginning of May, when the navy was mobilized as the danger of war with Spain increased, the preparations for the voyage were cancelled.

By this time the impatient Dalrymple had, in any event, turned to another method of carrying out his project. In a long memorandum of 2 February 1790 he argued that it was already too late to send an expedition around Cape Horn that year, because it would be winter before the vessels reached the northwest coast. Instead, he considered that 'the present Operation ought to be by Hudson's Bay in preference to Cape Horn: tho' by Cape Horn in preference to inaction'.² The memorandum revealed Dalrymple's growing conviction that a Northwest Passage existed; and his views on this subject were couched in terms more forthright and sanguine than in his memoirs published the year before, though the inherent weakness of his case was shown by the fact that to produce support for his belief he was obliged to delve far back into the past, to the highly imaginative maps of northeast America drawn in the period before Henry Hudson discovered the great bay which was named after him. When examined with the eyes of faith, these maps indicated just such a bay as Hudson had found, and a channel running from its northwest corner (Repulse Bay) to the northern

¹ Grenville to Phillip, March 1790. Printed in *Historical Records of Australia*, Series I, Vol. I (Sydney, 1914), pp. 161-4.

² Dalrymple [to Nepean?], 2 Feb. 1790. C.O. 42/72, p. 500.

ocean. The existence of this communication, Dalrymple asserted, was further confirmed by the Indian maps brought to England by Moses Norton which, he had already stated, 'imply that Hudson's Bay communicates with the Hyperborean Sea, which countenances the opinion of a Passage NWestward by Repulse Bay'.¹ Dalrymple went on to point out that those who had been on the northwest coast since Cook's last voyage considered that it was only a range of islands, and that

The Opinion therefore of a NW Passage is strongly confirmed by the concurrence of the antient Reports, the Indian Maps, and the opinion of those who have recently visited the NW Coast: The only allegations to the contrary are that Capt Middleton represents Repulse Bay to be shut up, and that Capt Cook and Capt Clerk could not find a Passage by the Strait of Anian, now called Behring's Strait.²

To one less stubborn than Dalrymple the explorations of Cook and Middleton would have appeared formidable evidence compared with the notoriously unreliable testimony offered by legend, Indian maps, and the reports of seamen who readily admitted that their object was trade, not exploration. But to Dalrymple, Middleton's 'conjecture' that Hudson Bay was closed to the northwest was unacceptable, and so were many of the opinions of Cook, whose experience and achievements Dalrymple dismissed with the curt comment, 'I cannot admit of a Pope in Geography or Navigation'.³ The great barrier of ice that had halted Cook's ships he explained by reviving Barrington's theories, and Dalrymple's new emphasis on this northern route through the polar sea suggests that Nepean had by this time passed on to him Ogden's letter, with its statement that the sea was free of ice within a month of Cook's departure in 1778.

It remained only for the theory to be put to the test. Dalrymple, in accordance with the preference he expressed in the memorandum for an expedition to Hudson Bay rather than to the Pacific, had already approached the Hudson's Bay Company, and a week later it agreed to send a sloop to explore the

¹ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur-Trade*, p. 7.

² C.O. 42/72, p. 503.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

west coast of the Bay. It added a proviso which echoed its painful experiences during the Dobbs crisis, for it was, Dalrymple told Nepean, 'particularly solicitous that Government would send a proper Person in her that the Publick may be assured of every thing being done to effect the desired Purpose'.¹ The man selected was Charles Duncan, who had proved his seamanship by the voyage to the northwest coast in the diminutive *Princess Royal*, and was apparently an excellent choice. A letter from the Company to the Admiralty secured his release,² and preparations were made, both for his voyage, and for an accompanying land expedition which was to be entrusted to George Dixon.

¹ Dalrymple to Nepean, 11 Feb. 1790. C.O. 42/72, p. 515.

² Wegg to Stephens, 28 March 1791; Stephens to Wegg, 28 March 1791. HBC A 5/3, ff. 52v, 53r.

*Final Disillusionment:
The Voyages of Charles Duncan
and George Vancouver*

IN the decade after the return of the *Resolution* and *Discovery* from the Pacific, views about the existence of a Northwest Passage changed appreciably. General acceptance of Cook's abrupt dismissal of the Fuca and Fonte narratives was gradually modified as the accounts of the fur traders reached England and it was realized that the shores glimpsed by Cook between Nootka and Cross Sound were not part of the mainland, as he had assumed, but the coasts of islands separated from each other by deep straits. How far those straits penetrated into the interior and towards Hudson Bay was not known; nor was there any agreement whether they were the openings alleged to have been discovered by Fuca and Fonte. On this question geographers and navigators were generally cautious and hesitant, but once again a few active and thrustful theorists exerted an influence out of all proportion to their number.

Among those who believed that the discoveries of the fur traders on the northwest coast proved the authenticity of the old accounts, and increased the probability of a passage, the most important figure was Dalrymple. Like Dobbs and Campbell he was more than a geographical theorist. He combined his extensive geographical knowledge with a passionate desire to promote British trade; and his insistence that maritime exploration would bring massive commercial benefits was a powerful argument at a time when the idea of discovery for its own sake did not hold universal appeal. To the Hudson's Bay Company he addressed no exhortations on its moral obligation to seek a

passage: instead he outlined the possibilities of participation in the Pacific fur trade which such a discovery would open to the Company. This was the bait with which Dalrymple sought to lure Wegg and his Committee, but although his importunities undoubtedly influenced the Company's decision to send a discovery expedition to Hudson Bay, the instructions given Duncan by the Committee in May 1790 bear the unmistakable imprint of Company policy rather than a reflection of Dalrymple's eagerness that Repulse Bay, as well as the coast farther south, should be examined.

First, Duncan was to try to find the outlet in Hudson Bay of the Yathked lake, which the Committee believed must be connected with the Bay by some waterway because according to Hearne (who had circled the Yathked and Dobaunt lakes in 1770 on his second unsuccessful attempt to reach the Coppermine River) the Eskimos normally wintered there. To find this particular opening along the shores of the Bay would clearly not be a simple matter. Fog, refraction caused by ice and snow, and the large variation of the compass in northern waters, rendered the hurried surveys made by the Company sloopers during the previous forty years of doubtful value; and no two maps seemed to agree on the position, name and description of inlets along the west coast of the Bay. Several inlets were shown on different maps lying either slightly south or north of Chesterfield Inlet, but as to their navigability or even existence, the Committee, after a puzzled study of the maps of Ellis, Christopher and Johnston, professed uncertainty. Presumably it hoped that through this very confusion openings might have escaped investigation because explorers were under the impression that they had already been examined. If Duncan failed to find this inlet along the coast, he was to sail up the Chesterfield, and trek overland from its head to the Yathked and Dobaunt lakes. There George Dixon was to be sent off to prospect a route to the Pacific by way of Hearne's Lake Arathapescow and Pond's Slave Lake (it was not yet realized in England that the two names referred to the same stretch of water). If Duncan dis-

covered a passage he was to sail through it to the Pacific coast and try to find a way into that inland sea described to him two years earlier by the natives he had met at the entrance of the strait of Juan de Fuca; and then he was either 'to return back, or to proceed to China'.¹

Despite this expression of belief that Duncan might find a passage, and the solemn presentation to him of a letter addressed to the East India Company factors at Canton, it is doubtful whether any of the Committee thought such a discovery probable, or even possible, by the route Duncan was instructed to follow. Hearne's explorations made it unlikely that a passage for sea-going vessels existed south of the sea he had sighted from the mouth of the Coppermine River, and Dalrymple had stressed that the best way to find the passage was to sail through Repulse Bay to Hearne's sea, and then cut through to one of the inlets on the Pacific coast. But Duncan was only to go farther north than Chesterfield Inlet after he had finished his examination of the outlet of the Yathked and Dobaunt lakes, and the Committee must have been well aware that the shortness of the navigable season would probably limit him to the performance of the first task. The imposition of this restriction raises doubts about the aim of the voyage, the only direct reference to which among the Company records is contained in a summary of the expedition, written after Duncan's return, which noted that the Committee had fitted out the expedition because reports had been circulated that 'the Governor and Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company were desirous of withholding from the public the probability of a North West Passage through Hudson's Bay into the Western Ocean; and also of keeping the Nature of their Trade a profound Secret'.²

This explanation seems to indicate that one motive for the expedition was the Company's customary sensitiveness to criticism, but there were more positive reasons closely connected

¹ Instructions to Captain Charles Duncan, 18 May 1790. HBC C 7/175, f. 4v. Dixon's instructions of the same date are to be found *ibid.*, ff. 10-11; but his part of the expedition was later cancelled.

² Memorandum, n.d. HBC C 7/13, f. 1r.

with Company policy in this period. Trade at Churchill had been declining for some time, and in 1781 the Committee had suggested to Hearne, then chief factor at the fort, that efforts should be made to increase trade 'on the Borders of the Great Lake in which Chesterfield Inlet ends'.¹ Hearne took no action, and trade continued to dwindle. In 1782 the great stone fort was partially destroyed by a French naval force, and although Hearne built a new post the next year, he failed to attract back the Indians in their old numbers, for the Montreal traders were not only intercepting the Chipewyans on the Churchill River as they brought their furs to the fort, but they were establishing posts around Lake Athabaska in the heart of the Chipewyan country. By 1789 the Committee was seriously perturbed by its failure to find a route between Hudson Bay and Lake Athabaska which would enable it to stop this draining away of the once profitable Churchill trade, and it set in motion a series of attempts to survey the waterways leading to the lakes west of the Bay.² The most urgent motive was to discover routes and establish posts that would enable the Company to fight the Canadian traders who were stifling its trade at its point of origin; and here Duncan's expedition could perform useful service which would amply repay the Company's expenditure on it. It might open trade with the little-known region at the head of Chesterfield Inlet; it might discover an easy route to the rich fur-bearing Athabaska country; it might conceivably even find a waterway across the continent which would make it worthwhile for the Company to export some of its furs direct to China, a warming thought to a Committee depressed by the fall in price of beaver on the London market following the stoppage of trade between Russia and China. If Duncan failed to find any sort of route to the west, his surveys should at least provide the Committee with a reliable map of the Bay coast between Churchill and Chester-

¹ Committee to Hearne, 16 May 1781. HBC A 6/13, f. 12r.

² See J. B. Tyrrell (ed.), *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor* (Toronto, The Champlain Society, XXI, 1934); E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, II (London, The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), Chs. V and VI.

field Inlet. To Dalrymple and Duncan the Northwest Passage was the great objective, but it is doubtful whether the London Committee entertained similar illusions. It was willing to bow before the windy enthusiasm of Dalrymple, who might prove a dangerous opponent if thwarted as Dobbs had been,¹ but it was careful to direct Duncan to those parts of the Bay where there was most probability, not of finding the passage, but of bringing immediate local benefits to the Company.

At the same time, the Company's use of navy men to carry out this discovery project revealed its anxiety to draw attention to its zeal for exploration. There was nothing reprehensible about this desire for favourable publicity: for too long the Company's explorations had been carried on in undeserved obscurity, and the release of Hearne's journal, the permission to Dalrymple to inspect the manuscript maps in the Company archives, and the co-operation with cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith, all signify that change in Company policy which had become particularly marked since Wegg's election as Governor in 1782. The enlistment of Duncan and Dixon on the expeditions to explore the west coast of the Bay was another indication of this altered attitude, which had been adopted by the Company partly out of enlightenment, partly from necessity. It was now essential, not only that exploration should be done, but that it should be seen to be done, and the Company accordingly made arrangements for Duncan's journal to be published on his return.²

The thrifty Committee intended Duncan to use the sloop normally attached to Churchill for his discovery expedition, but the Company ship carrying the explorer to the Bay did not arrive at the fort until the middle of September 1790, and there Duncan found the sloop in a decrepit condition, the crew semi-mutinous, and the factor obstructive. It was the same dismal

¹ Sir John Barrow once wrote of the geographer: 'Mr. Dalrymple was in fact an impracticable and obstinate man, and very difficult to be diverted from any plan or project he had conceived.' *Sketches of the Royal Society and Royal Society Clubs* (London, 1849), p. 138.

² See Memorandum, HBC 7/13, f. iv.

combination of circumstances that had plagued earlier Company expeditions to the north, but in London the Committee was sufficiently concerned about Duncan's outraged return to England to buy a strong brig, the *Beaver*, for his use the next year. Again, there was no attempt to keep the expedition secret. Publicity about the Company's endeavours could only be advantageous, and there were references to the proposed expedition in Meares' book and in various reviews of it. Even so, in the spring of 1791 *The Gentleman's Magazine* published a lengthy letter from a Pembrokeshire resident who revived the old complaints of Dobbs about the 'inexcusable neglect as well as counterfeited endeavours' of the Company to seek a passage, and as a parting shot advised discovery expeditions entering Hudson Bay to avoid the Company ships 'to prevent all sinister tampering'.¹

Duncan's instructions for 1791 were the same as those he had received the previous year, although in the meantime news of Mackenzie's discoveries had reached England, and Barrington commented in a letter to Douglas, 'Where Mr. D: is to navigate in a N:W: inland passage seems to be rather a difficult problem'.² The reports of Mackenzie's explorations might well have acted as a spur to send Duncan to the Bay again, for the anxiety of Wegg and the Committee about the activities of the rival company would hardly be quieted by the news from Quebec that the North West Company's 'views, in taking these pains proceed from the hope that if they succeed in penetrating to the Ocean, Government may be induced to Grant them a Charter, and Exclusive Right in the lucrative Furs trade to those parts'.³

In the summer of 1791 Duncan made an early start from England, sailing ahead of the Company ships; but to little purpose, because ice delayed him in Hudson Strait for seven weeks, and he lost the remainder of the brief navigable season weather-bound at Marble Island. Duncan, rueful and not a little baffled

¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LXI (May 1791), pp. 404-6.

² Barrington to Douglas, 26 Feb. 1791. B.M.Eg.MSS. 2186, f. 24v.

³ J. F. Holland to Nepean, 10 Nov. 1790. C.O. 42/72, p. 555.

by his first experience of Bay conditions, decided to winter at Churchill and make an early start the next spring; and after a miserable stay of ten months in the cramped quarters of the fort he left for the north again in the middle of July 1792. Near Marble Island a bay was discovered which Duncan identified as Corbet's Bay, shown on Ellis' map (which was republished in 1787) open to the west.¹ The mate, George Taylor, was sent to investigate, and found that the water was too shoal even to take the brig's longboat. From the bay Duncan sailed north again, but made no discovery of consequence until he reached Chesterfield Inlet at the beginning of August. He had found no inlet or river which gave any indication of leading to the west, and with his instructions forbidding him to sail farther north until he had carried out the first part of his task, he had little alternative but to enter an inlet that had already been explored three times. For a week the brig sailed cautiously up Chesterfield Inlet with Norton's chart as a guide; then Duncan and Taylor decided that it would be safer to complete their examination in the longboat. By the middle of August they had reached Baker Lake at the end of the inlet, and there they went up the same small river that Norton had discovered thirty years earlier. Four miles from its mouth it shallowed to three feet, and dry ridges appeared over which not even a canoe could pass; and although Taylor followed the stream on foot for another twenty miles it became little deeper. The disheartened Duncan ignored that part of his instructions which ordered him to go overland from the head of Chesterfield Inlet to the Yathked and Dobaunt lakes—probably he considered it too late in the season to undertake such a task—and the longboat returned to the brig without delay. The expedition called at Churchill, and then left for England.

The voyage had been altogether devoid of interest or drama, but the document in the Company archives describing the

¹ Details of the voyage are taken from the journals of the *Beaver* kept by the mate, George Taylor (HBC C 1/204, 205). Duncan did not hand his journal to the Company, nor is it among the Admiralty logs in the Public Record Office, although there is a manuscript map of his explorations at the Hydrographic Dept. of the Admiralty (B65 Ai. 1).

circumstances under which the expedition was projected, also contains the information that Duncan, who prior to his Sailing, entertained the most positive Assurances that he should discover the often sought for North West Passage . . . felt the disappointment so severely, that whilst on his Voyage home he was attack'd by a Brain Fever'.¹ Taylor's journal relates the story of the homeward voyage in clinical detail. After Duncan made several attempts to commit suicide the crew were forced to tie him to his bunk, and finally he was transferred in mid-ocean to the Company ship *Seahorse*, which brought him back to England. The expedition, a disgruntled member of the Committee told Barrington, had cost £3,000 and accomplished nothing.² Duncan had not made any new discoveries because there were none left to make on the west coast of the Bay; and his explorations served only to confirm the opinion of Middleton, Norton and Hearne that no passage existed between Hudson Bay and the Pacific.

At the same time as Duncan was making his despairing efforts to find a passage along the west coast of Hudson Bay, on the Pacific coast fifteen hundred miles distant an explorer of a very different stamp was methodically carrying out surveys which were finally to extinguish the last hopes that a navigable passage would be found in temperate latitudes. With the flaring of the Nootka crisis at the end of April 1790, preparations for the projected Admiralty expedition to the northwest coast of America had been cancelled, and during the weeks of the 'Spanish armament' officers and men from the *Discovery* had been dispersed through the fleet; but a fortnight after the signing of the Nootka Sound convention in October the Navy Board was instructed to prepare the vessel once more for a voyage 'to remote parts'.³ George Vancouver, chosen as first lieutenant on the original expedition, was appointed commander in place of Roberts, and the *Chatham*, a tender of one hundred and thirty

¹ Memorandum, HBC 7/13, f. iv.

² Barrington to Douglas, 13 Dec. 1792. B.M.Eg.MSS. 2186, f. 73.

³ Admiralty Board Minutes, 16 Nov. 1790. Adm 3/107.

tons, was provided as consort, and placed under the command of Lieutenant Broughton.

Vancouver had sailed at the age of fifteen on Cook's second voyage, and again on the third to seek the Northwest Passage. He had since served in the West Indies, and at the time of his appointment to the *Discovery* was in his mid thirties.¹ As the Admiralty paid off the ship after his appointment, Vancouver was able to select his own officers. Both his second and third lieutenants, Peter Puget and Joseph Baker, and his master Joseph Whidbey, had served with him in the West Indies; and a letter from Thomas Manby, master's mate on the *Discovery* (and a Norfolk man like Vancouver) to a friend in December 1790, shows that Vancouver had approached him with an offer to sail on the voyage.² This care in picking officers and lower ranks was to serve Vancouver in good stead, because during the forthcoming voyage an unusually large share of responsibility rested on their shoulders.

Grenville was again responsible for the direction of the expedition, and in February 1791 sent the Admiralty detailed instructions for the voyage, which were passed on to Vancouver in the orders he received from the Admiralty the next month.³ He was set two tasks. By the Nootka Sound convention it had been agreed that the land and buildings at Nootka belonging to British subjects, and seized by the Spaniards in April 1789, should be restored to Britain; and Grenville appointed Vancouver as the government's representative to receive this restitution. Details of the parts to be restored had not yet been

¹ George Godwin's *Vancouver A Life 1757-1798* (London, 1930) contains the most important details of the explorer's life, as well as a good account of the voyage.

² See Mary C. Wittington (comp.), *A Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Collection of Western Americana in the Yale University Library* (Yale University Press, 1952), p. 179 (entry 325).

³ There are copies of Grenville's letter of 11 Feb. 1791 in C.O. 5/187, ff. 19-24; H.O. 28/8; and Adm 1/4156, No. 14. The Admiralty's instructions to Vancouver, dated 8 March 1791, are printed in George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean . . . Principally with a View to ascertain the existence of any navigable communication between the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans* (London, 1798), I, introduction, pp. xvii-xxiii.

settled by the two governments, but Vancouver was informed he would receive further instructions by a storeship which would be sent to him with supplies the next winter. If this vessel did not arrive before he left his winter quarters at the Sandwich Islands, he was to begin the second part of his task; the examination of the northwest coast of America between latitudes 30° N. and 60° N.

The main object of this survey, Vancouver was informed, was the discovery of a waterway which would facilitate the development of trade between the northwest coast of America and British territories to the east. That it was a route suitable for ocean-to-ocean trade which was being sought was emphasized by the order that Vancouver was neither 'to pursue any inlet or river further than it shall appear to be navigable by vessels of such burthen as might safely navigate the pacific ocean', nor concern himself with 'too minute and particular an examination of the detail of the different parts of the coast'. The instructions directed Vancouver to pay special attention to two stretches of the coast. First, he was carefully to explore 'the supposed straits of Juan de Fuca, said to be situated between 48° and 49° north latitude, and to lead to an opening through which the sloop Washington is reported to have passed in 1789, and to have come out again to the northward of Nootka'. The influence of Meares' assertions is evident here, although the cautious wording indicates some scepticism. Secondly, Grenville commented, in a clause which demonstrated the effect of Pond's maps and theories, there was 'the greatest probability' that Cook's River rose in one of the lakes known to the Canadian traders and the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, although he stressed that a communication farther to the south would be more useful as a trade route.

The instructions as a whole revealed the influence of Dalrymple's theories. Vancouver's quest was not for the river and lake network that Mackenzie and the Nor'Westers were seeking for their birch canoes, but for a route open to ocean-going craft. The extent of coastline he was ordered to explore meant that

his voyage would finally determine the authenticity of the Fuca and Fonte accounts; and his surveys would be the more important because by the convention of October 1790 Spain had been forced to abandon its exclusive claim to the entire northwest coast. With the British principle of effective occupation grudgingly accepted, the region north of the Spanish settlements was now open to the traders of every nation, and Vancouver's instructions show that Grenville was aware that the discovery of a passage from Hudson Bay to the northwest coast would give British traders an advantage over their American and European rivals. There is evidence that the Secretary of State had been thinking along these lines before the signing of the convention, and even before the Nootka dispute reached the crisis point of May 1790. His draft of March 1790 intended for Phillip shows that by that time the decision to send an expedition to the northwest coast had been taken, and that it was intended for exploration as well as settlement, because Grenville mentioned that the *Discovery* 'has been fitted for the purpose of surveying'.¹ Furthermore, he had already sanctioned a land expedition to northwest America under the command of Captain John Frederick Holland, who planned to follow the river rumoured to flow from the Great Slave Lake to the Pacific.² This double-pronged attempt to reach and explore the inlets and rivers of the northwest coast represented a co-ordinated effort to put into practice the dreams and tentative plans of a generation earlier, when Byron had been directed to the north Pacific, and the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, Sir Guy Carleton, had wondered whether the fur traders of the interior might not 'set out early in the spring for the Pacific Ocean, find out a good port, take its latitude, longitude, and describe it so accurately as to enable our ships from the East Indies to find it out with

¹ Grenville to Phillip, March 1790. *Historical Records of Australia*, Series I, vol. I, p. 161.

² A summary of Holland's project, dated Dec. 1790, is in C.O. 42/72, pp. 521-7. See also Holland's letter to Simcoe, 6 Oct. 1792. C.O. 42/317, f. 125.

ease'.¹ Finally, Grenville's project was also linked with the expeditions of Duncan and Dixon westward from Hudson Bay.²

The scheme was disrupted for a number of reasons. The Roberts expedition was cancelled because of the threat of war with Spain, Duncan reached Hudson Bay in 1790 too late to begin explorations, and when Holland arrived in Quebec that autumn he learned that Mackenzie had discovered that Pond's river from Great Slave Lake flowed towards the polar sea, not the Pacific. In the winter of 1790-91 some of the pieces were put together again, and while the Hudson's Bay Company prepared to send Duncan to the Bay again in the *Beaver*, the naval expedition originally planned the previous spring was re-organized under Vancouver's command. That his task of receiving the restitution at Nootka was secondary to the necessity for a comprehensive survey of the northwest coast is shown by the fact that when he left England the details of the restitution had not been settled, and although he was promised further instructions by the *Daedalus* storeship, when these arrived he found that they contained only a general order from Count Floridablanca, the Spanish foreign minister, instructing the Spanish commandant at Nootka to surrender to Vancouver the area in possession of the British in April 1789. This principle had already been settled by the convention: what was at dispute was the actual extent of the area to be restored, and on this point Vancouver never received guidance. The order of priorities was set out in the covering letter from Henry Dundas to the Admiralty in July 1791 which accompanied Floridablanca's order. This was to be given to the commander of the *Daedalus*, who was instructed 'on meeting with Capt. Vancouver to deliver to

¹ Quoted in T. C. Elliott, 'The Strange Case of Jonathan Carver and the Name Oregon', *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XXI (1920), p. 358.

² A brief note from Dalrymple to Grenville (C.O. 42/72, p. 533) in April 1790 seems to indicate that the final decision whether the Hudson's Bay Company should send Duncan and Dixon to the Bay rested with Grenville. Holland's summary mentioned the possibility that he might link up with a party from Hudson House (a Company post on the Saskatchewan) when he reached the Pacific coast; and this was presumably a reference to Dixon's proposed expedition.

him the Letters abovementioned relative to the Restitutions, and to put himself under his direction for the execution of this Service, in order that Capt. Vancouver may be impeded as little as possible in the progress of his intended Survey'.¹

While engaged on this survey Vancouver was ordered to co-operate with any Spanish discovery vessels he encountered, and this clause of his instructions was a prophetic one for (unknown to the British government) the Spaniards at this time were carrying out extensive explorations on the northwest coast. This activity stemmed from an apprehension that foreign intruders might be establishing posts to the north which would threaten Spanish possessions, and the explorations were centred on those stretches of the coast where the entrance of the Northwest Passage was rumoured to lie. In the summer of 1789 a schooner from the Spanish-occupied post at Nootka spotted the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and in the next three years Spanish expeditions explored and mapped the outlines of that strait, and of the Strait of Georgia.² Attempts were also made to survey the coast farther north. In 1790 a Spanish expedition under Fidalgo explored Prince William Sound and entered Cook Inlet; in 1791 the Alaskan coast from Prince William Sound southward was examined (admittedly in somewhat perfunctory fashion) by Spanish ships commanded by the Italian explorer Malaspina, who was diverted from his task of surveying the coasts of Spanish America by dispatches from Madrid enclosing a report of a strait on the northwest coast in latitude 60° N. supposed to have been discovered in 1588 by a Spanish seaman, Maldonado;³ and in 1792 Caamaño searched the coast near latitude 53° N. for Fonte's strait. No signs of a passage were found, and the views of the Spanish seamen were summed up by Caamaño's comments on the Fonte narrative which, he wrote,

¹ Dundas to Admiralty, 6 July 1791. Adm 1/4156, No. 50.

² See H. R. Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca* (Santa Ana, 1933).

³ An examination of Maldonado's account, as extraordinary in its way as those attributed to Fuca and Fonte, is contained in Wagner, 'Apocryphal Voyages', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, XLI, pp. 218-34.

'seems to have no other foundation than the madness or ignorance of some one devoid of all knowledge of either navigation or geography, who, wishing to stimulate the search for a N.E.^{n.} passage leading into the Atlantic, invented (so I venture to suggest) this story'¹ By the autumn of 1792, before Vancouver had been more than a few months on the coast, the Spanish authorities had satisfied themselves that the straits described in the Fuca and Fonte accounts did not exist; and although Vancouver did not allow the conclusions of the Spaniards to deter him from completing his own survey of the coast, and some of his officers regarded the Spanish reports and maps with pointed suspicion, his expedition's work was inevitably marked by a certain degree of pessimism.

Vancouver's ships sighted the American coast in latitude $39^{\circ}20'$ N. on 18 April 1792, just over a year after their departure from England. As they sailed north along the coast the masthead look-outs scanned the shoreline for signs of Aguilar's river or strait, but after ten days nothing resembling it had been noticed,² and on 28 April the ships drew near Cape Flattery and the opening named after Juan de Fuca. That afternoon a vessel was sighted flying American colours. The sight of any ship was a novelty after eight months during which no other sail had been seen, and excitement rose when it was found that the ship, the *Columbia* of Boston, was commanded by Robert Gray, who (according to Meares) had sailed through the strait of Fuca into an inland sea, and back into the Pacific through the entrance discovered by Fonte. It was an extraordinary coincidence that as the expedition approached the famous strait it should encounter the one man who, it was supposed, had sailed through it; and Puget and the botanist Archibald Menzies eagerly went

¹ H. R. Wagner and W. A. Newcombe (eds.), 'The Journal of Jacinto Caamaño' (trans. H. Grenville), *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, II (1938), p. 299.

² Vancouver, like Meares three years earlier, missed the entrance of the great river Columbia in latitude $46^{\circ}10'$ N. He mistook the estuary of the river for a small inlet.

on board the American trader to question Gray. But when he was confronted with the account attributed to him, and shown the track of the *Washington* on a map, an astounded Gray denied making the voyage described by Meares. He stated that he had only sailed about fifty miles up the strait, and had then returned; and although he thought that the strait was the one discovered by Fuca, on board Vancouver's ships confidence that the strait would lead into a great inland sea was sadly shaken by this disillusioning encounter.

The next day the entrance to the strait, the southern shore of which was found to lie in latitude $48^{\circ}23' N.$, was reached, and the ships sailed through it with the crews expectantly comparing the view with the descriptions given by Duncan and Meares. On 30 April Vancouver stated that the expedition had reached a part of the strait unvisited by Europeans—at this time he knew nothing about the Spanish explorations of the previous two years—and while he and his officers explored the deep inlets of Hood Canal and Puget Sound, Broughton in the *Chatham* was sent northward. On his return he reported that an extensive arm of the sea filled with islands stretched in several branches from the northwest to the northeast. This was the southern entrance of the Strait of Georgia. Broughton's report, and the intricate nature of the coastline revealed to the *Discovery*'s surveying parties, forced Vancouver to consider whether his instructions should not be modified. He had been ordered to investigate only rivers and inlets navigable for ocean-going craft, but he saw quite clearly that if he left part of the maze of channels unexplored it would not be long before the 'closet navigators' of Europe would discover those partly explored inlets to be extensive straits and passages.

Another circumstance which hardened Vancouver in his decision to go beyond his instructions was the bad sailing qualities of the *Chatham*, which he had been ordered to use in waters too dangerous for the larger *Discovery*. Her master Johnstone had written in disgust to a friend while the expedition was at the Cape of Good Hope: 'The Chatham was, without a doubt, the

most improper vessel that could have been pitched upon. She draws 12½ feet of water, and is scarcely the burthen of 120 tons; she has neither breadth nor length in the least reasonable proportion: where then is the fitness for rivers and shallows, which they say we are to explore?¹ The unsuitability of the sturdy but ungainly tender for close coastal work confirmed Vancouver's growing conviction that his task could only be effectively carried out by surveying parties working from boats, and on 25 May he laid down the policy that was to be followed for the rest of the voyage:

I became thoroughly convinced, that our boats alone could enable us to acquire any correct or satisfactory information respecting this broken country; and although the execution of such a service in open boats would necessarily be extremely laborious, and expose those so employed to numberless dangers and unpleasant situations, that might occasionally produce great fatigue, and protract their return to the ships; yet that mode was undoubtedly the most accurate, the most ready, and indeed the only one in our power to pursue for ascertaining the continental boundary.²

Not once did Vancouver waver from this course of action, and with the aid of competent and diligent officers he spent the next three seasons making a detailed survey unsurpassed in extent and thoroughness.

Not until the beginning of June was the examination of the southeast corner of the Fuca strait completed. This, Vancouver

¹ Quoted in Godwin, *Vancouver*, pp. 39-40.

² Vancouver, *Voyage*, I, p. 267. This three-volume edition of Vancouver's journal was published a few months after his death. He saw most of it through the press before he died, and wrote all except the last hundred pages of the third volume. Vancouver's original journal has never been found, and it is difficult to estimate the extent of his revision of it for publication. As far as can be ascertained, Vancouver was scrupulously honest in admitting mistakes of policy or judgment: for example, he made no attempt to gloss over his failure to notice the estuary of the Columbia River in April 1792. However, the loss of all but a fragment of his manuscript journal is particularly vexing because of the other official logs and journals kept on board the two ships only those of Lieutenant Peter Puget describe the events of the voyage in detail. Fortunately, there are several private journals which contain valuable additional information. These journals are listed, and have been extensively used, in Bern Anderson's recent work, *Surveyor of the Sea: The Life and Voyages of Captain George Vancouver* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1960).

realized, was an indication that the survey would only be accomplished by 'very slow degrees', and Puget accurately forecast that the expedition would take three years to complete its work on the northwest coast.¹ From Puget Sound the ships headed up the Strait of Georgia, anchoring at intervals to allow the boat parties to explore each of the long narrow inlets which extended a hundred miles or more inland. On leaving one of these inlets at the end of June Vancouver was astonished to find two small Spanish vessels lying at anchor. They were commanded by two of Malaspina's officers, Galiano and Valdés, who informed Vancouver that they were under orders to complete the examination of the strait, the shores of which had been explored by a Spanish expedition the year before to a point a few miles farther north than the ships were anchored. To Vancouver, convinced that he was the first to explore the region, this was mortifying news, but relations between the two expeditions were friendly, and for some time they worked together. They were not able to give each other information of any great value since their surveys covered the same area. Nor did the expeditions gain the knowledge they expected from each other about earlier voyages, for the only account the Spaniards possessed of voyages through the Fuca strait came from Meares' book, and, complained Vancouver, 'so far were those gentlemen from being better acquainted with the discoveries of De Fuca or De Fonte than ourselves, that, from us, they expected much information as to the truth of such reports'.²

So Vancouver carried on his careful, methodical survey of the inlets along the eastern shores of the Strait of Georgia, and on more than one occasion officers commanding the boats grew optimistic that the channel they were following deep into the mountains might pass through the deep range towering over them. Vancouver's flat and prosaic narrative is seldom dramatic,

¹ Log of Lieutenant Puget, 19 Aug. 1792. Adm 55/27, f. 133r.

² Vancouver, *Voyage*, I, p. 318. The Spaniards did, however, inform Vancouver that they had discovered a river near the entrance of the Strait of Georgia. Vancouver, inexplicably, had passed the delta of this river, the Fraser, without noticing it.

and a more revealing description of the deceptive appearance of these inlets is given in one of the Spanish journals:

Many of these channels present an aspect entirely novel. Following the mainland some breaks are to be seen and on going into any of them an arm of the sea is found, usually tortuous, half a mile or 1 to 2 miles wide, formed by the sides of rocky mountains, which are very lofty and almost straight up, so they look like a very lofty wall. In mid-channel bottom is not usually found at 80 fathoms and on sounding near the shores the lead is sometimes felt to roll down without stopping. Anyone entering to survey these channels will be surprised, and perhaps will think he has found the desired communication with the other sea, and an easy means of getting many leagues into the interior of the mainland, but all his hopes will fade, when, without having seen any sign to indicate that the channel is coming to an end, he will find on turning a bend that the mountains have closed up on both sides and form an arc, leaving usually a narrow beach, on which a few steps may be taken.¹

In July Vancouver was heartened by the discovery that a narrow passage connected the northern end of the Strait of Georgia with the open ocean. This not only confirmed that the region around Nootka was part of a large island or archipelago, but saved Vancouver the necessity of retracing his route through the Fuca strait. On 9 August the ships entered the ocean through Queen Charlotte Sound, and reached a part of the ocean which had been visited by several traders, including Charles Duncan, even then seeking a way through Chesterfield Inlet to the Pacific. The ships had only sailed as far north as latitude 52° N. when a trading vessel brought news that the *Daedalus* had arrived at Nootka, and that its commander had been murdered in the Sandwich Islands.

Vancouver decided to make for Nootka at once. The season had been well spent; the expedition's explorations had shown that there was no passage eastward between latitudes 39° N. and 52° N. The three months spent in surveying the Strait of Juan de Fuca and its subsidiary channels had proved that even if Fuca had discovered the great gulf, he had never made the

¹ Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca*, pp. 264-5.

voyage attributed to him in Purchas. This result Vancouver had expected, but the coast to the north, where many maps placed the entrance of Fonte's river or strait, remained to be explored, and Puget pointed out: 'to form or venture an opinion on the small part of the Coast we have already seen relative to the Existence of a NW Passage would be ridiculous. I shall therefore leave it to some Future Period when our Knowledge of the Coast will be more Extensive'.¹

Nootka was reached at the end of August, and the Spanish establishment there was found to be under the command of Bodega, an officer who in 1775 had sailed on the Spanish discovery expedition to the north. Relations between the two commanders were courteous and friendly, and Bodega gave Vancouver full details of the Spanish explorations of the previous few years. They could not, however, reach any agreement on the restitution question. In the lack of detailed instructions Vancouver decided to claim the harbour of Nootka, but Bodega was only willing to make a token surrender of the hundred square yards of beach where Meares had built a house and breastwork. When Vancouver's long account of his negotiations reached England the next summer it provoked an impatient comment from a member of the government, who wrote on a note attached to the bulky folder: 'All that we really are anxious about in this particular part of the Business is the safety of our national honour which renders a Restitution necessary. The extent of that Restitution is not of much moment.'² Vancouver, far away in the Pacific, was not to know that by this time England was in alliance with Spain against the revolutionary government of France, and that the incident at Nootka three years earlier which had been the immediate cause of the 1790 crisis was fading into obscurity. He approached his diplomatic responsibilities at Nootka with the same conscientious thoroughness with which he was carrying out his great survey; and so anxious

¹ Puget Log, 19 Aug. 1792. Adm 55/27, f. 131r.

² C.O. 5/187, f. 80. In 1794 the British and Spanish governments signed a further convention agreeing to the mutual abandonment of Nootka.

was he that the government should learn of the Spanish attitude that when Broughton, who had been searching for the entrance of a river reported by Gray in latitude 46°18' N.,¹ met him at San Francisco, he also was sent back to England with dispatches. Puget was appointed commander of the *Chatham*, and the ships sailed to Monterey, and then to the Sandwich Islands, where the expedition spent the winter.

In the spring of 1793 the *Discovery* left the Sandwich Islands for the northwest coast, and joined the *Chatham* which had sailed earlier to carry out some repairs at Nootka. By the end of May the ships had reached the northernmost point of their explorations of the previous year, and were near that stretch of coast where many maps marked Fonte's Río los Reyes. The same surveying procedure was followed as before, and each inlet leading inland was traced to its head by boat parties from the two ships. This part of the coast, between latitudes 52° N. and 57° N., was even more intricate than the eastern shore of the Strait of Georgia, and often it was difficult to tell mainland from island. Progress was necessarily slow among channels and inlets of which Caamaño had written in despair the year before: 'the examination of so many as are comprised in that stretch of coast would require the short favourable seasons of several years, and a stock of provisions such as no vessel could either stow or keep in wholesome condition'.² Parts of the region had been visited by Spanish explorers and British traders, but their accounts and maps could not be relied upon to any great degree, and Vancouver's men charted the coastline mile by mile, regardless of whether it had been mapped by earlier expeditions.

The first channels explored were those leading inland from Fitzhugh Sound, discovered by James Hanna in 1786, and into which he thought a large river flowed. No trace of this river was found, and Puget pointed out that the grass, trees and other

¹ This was the Columbia River. Broughton confirmed Gray's report and crossed the treacherous bar at the mouth of the river. He explored one hundred miles upriver before turning back.

² 'Caamaño Journal', *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, II, p. 300.

debris floating in the waters of the sound had probably been brought down by melting snow from the mountains, and not by the Río los Reyes as Hanna had imagined. A small river (the Bella Coola) was found at the beginning of June in the next inlet to the north; seven weeks later Alexander Mackenzie reached its mouth after the first overland journey across the continent to the Pacific. He had come, however, not by the broad and navigable waterway envisaged by Dalrymple, but along perilous streams and difficult portages, and it was five hundred miles farther south, by way of the Columbia, that the fur traders eventually found their route to the Pacific. By the time Mackenzie reached the sea, Vancouver's ships had moved north, and the two explorers never met, nor were they aware of each other's presence on the coast.

The latitude of Fonte's Río los Reyes was crossed by Vancouver's surveying parties without any sign of a river being found, and not until latitude 54°15' N. was reached, at Port Essington, was another river discovered. Its mouth was so shallow that Joseph Whidbey, master of the *Discovery* and one of the hardest worked members of the expedition, did not risk his boats in it. It was the Skeena River; and the one serious blemish on the survey made by Vancouver was that he either missed altogether, or did not appreciate the significance of, the three major rivers of the northwest coast: the Columbia, Fraser and Skeena. Vancouver was by this time anxious to get farther north, because William Brown, commander of three British trading vessels on the coast, had just informed him that they had sailed through a large opening in latitude 54°45' N. which branched into several channels. Vancouver noted that the opening was probably the same as that shown on Caamaño's chart with the name Estrecho de Almirante Fuentes. Vancouver's entries on such points of speculative geography were invariably curt, but Menzies' journal supplies more information. Brown's ships had pushed farther up the inlet than Caamaño's vessels had ventured, and had discovered one particularly large channel which the natives claimed led so far inland that they could sail

along it for two or three months in their canoes. This news, wrote Menzies, 'greatly excited our curiosity'.¹

Brown lent Vancouver one of his vessels to sound ahead of the ships and guide them to the inlet, and Vancouver regretted that the expedition had not been supplied with one or two small sailing galleys to carry out explorations. In default of them, Vancouver had no alternative but to expose his officers and men to the rigours of long surveys in open boats. When he reached the entrance of the inlet described by Brown he found it not as impressive as he had been led to believe, for it was only two and a half miles wide, and soon narrowed. Nevertheless Vancouver decided that he would undertake the examination of the inlet in person, for he was convinced that its exploration would finally determine the authenticity of the Fonte account. The yawl and launch left the ships on 23 July and did not return until 16 August. The boats headed north up a channel for one hundred and twenty miles before turning, first westward and then southward, to complete the circumnavigation of a large island which Vancouver named after Revilla Gigedo, the viceroy of New Spain. On this voyage the natives, for the first time, showed themselves to be dangerously hostile, and their great canoes crammed with painted and excitable spearmen were not dispersed until the boat crews opened fire. The work was arduous enough without this sort of distraction, and behind Vancouver's terse summary of this expedition, in itself but one of many, can be glimpsed the strain entailed in making his vast survey: 'We had now been almost entirely confined to the boats for twenty-three days; in which time we had traversed upward of 700 geographical miles, without having advanced our primary object, of tracing the continental boundary, more than 20 leagues from the station of the vessels'.² However, Vancouver was quick to point out the significance of his recent explorations in disproving

¹ Journal of Archibald Menzies, B.M.Add.MSS. 32,641, f. 330. That part of the journal covering the period April–October 1792 has been edited by C. F. Newcombe and published under the title *Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage* (Archives of British Columbia, Memoir No. V, Victoria, 1923).

² Vancouver, *Voyage*, II, p. 371.

the Fonte account. He had surveyed the coast as far north as latitude 56° N., and instead of the Río los Reyes had only found, in latitudes 54°15' N. and 54°59' N., two rivulets which corresponded neither in position nor size to the traditional description of Fonte's great river.

Vancouver, a precise navigator who sternly pointed out minute errors in the observations of earlier explorers, had little patience with the vague accounts attributed to Fuca and Fonte by theorists who found difficulty in deciding whether the Río los Reyes lay in latitude 53° N. or (as Buache had maintained) in latitude 63° N.; but at least one member of the expedition held different views from the captain. Menzies, the botanist and now also surgeon, revealed the same stubborn optimism on this voyage as Gore had in 1778. He considered that the shallowness of the mouth of the river discovered in latitude 54°59' N. should not have prevented a thorough exploration of it, because even if it were not the river Parmentier described by Fonte, native reports suggested that it extended far inland and, concluded Menzies, it 'might in the end turn out of the greatest utility to the commercial interest of our Colonies on the opposite side'.¹ The botanist was no doubt prudent enough to confine these heretical observations to the privacy of his journal (which he refused to hand to Vancouver at the end of the voyage), and there was no repetition of the events of Cook's third voyage, when the attention Cook paid to the differing opinions of his officers delayed his attempt to reach the north. Vancouver had been a midshipman on that expedition, and it is possible that the unhappy experiences of the 1778 and 1779 seasons were responsible for the stern rigidity of his attitude. He appears to have sought no advice from his officers, and was a harsh disciplinarian. He was not a tolerant man, and it is perhaps significant that the logs of his officers reveal none of that detail and diversity of view which make the journals from Cook's third voyage of such value to the historian. With the exception of Puget's rambling journals, they are studiously brief.

¹ Menzies Journal, B.M.Add.MSS. 32,641, f. 343.

But if Vancouver neither sought nor obtained the affection of his subordinates, he commanded their respect and co-operation. Without the skill of the officers in charge of the surveying boats, and the dogged persistence of the men at the oars, his achievement would not have been possible. The season had been a hard one, with the boat crews suffering from exposure and hunger. Much of their work was done in the drenching downpours of the steady rain of the Pacific coast, and Vancouver himself was ill for weeks on end; but his determination to complete the survey with the same detailed accuracy with which he had begun it never faltered. As the ships left the coast in September with the nights drawing in and the weather becoming increasingly boisterous, Vancouver reflected: 'My mind was by no means satisfied with the small extent, in a direct line, which had been examined during the late summer; yet I derived great consolation from the reflection that, in all probability, we had overcome the most arduous part of our task . . . should the information we had thus obtained reach Europe, there would no longer remain a doubt as to the extent or the fallacy of the pretended discoveries'.¹

One enthusiast in England was foolhardy enough to produce *Observations on the Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans* while Vancouver was away on his voyage. This was William Goldson, a Portsmouth surgeon, whose book was published in 1793. He had more material than the earlier theorists to juggle with, for to the accounts of Fuca and Fonte he was able to add that of Maldonado, and the erratic surveys of Peter Pond. His arguments are not worth detailed examination, because their absurdity was being revealed by Vancouver at the very time that they were being printed. Briefly, they can be summarized as follows. Fonte in 1640 had entered a river in latitude 53° N. along the coast opposite the Queen Charlotte Islands, through which he had sailed into lakes Velasco and Belle, both of which Goldson asserted were parts of the Great Slave Lake. From there he had passed northeast into the sea which Indian accounts and the Hudson's Bay Company maps showed to lie west

¹ Vancouver, *Voyage*, II, p. 418.

of Repulse Bay, and which was connected with Hudson Bay. The Strait of Anian had been entered by Maldonado in 1588, and by Barnarda in 1640, and was actually Prince William Sound, where Gore in 1778 had noticed an opening to the north-east which Cook refused to explore. This strait, Goldson concluded, led past Hearne's Coppermine River, and into the sea west of Repulse Bay.

These theories were possible because, before Vancouver's expedition, there was no comprehensive map of the northwest coast of America. In the gaps between the surveys of Cook and the fur traders, geographers could safely show the entrances of straits and passages leading into the interior. Vancouver, with his methodical surveys and detailed charts, proved that these passages did not exist. In 1792 he showed the Fuca voyage to be a fable, and his explorations of 1793 revealed that the Fonte voyage was equally apocryphal. Nor was he content to let the readers of his account note for themselves the contrast between the theories of the speculative geographers and the explorations of his expedition. He outlined the conjectures of Dalrymple, Meares and others with sardonic emphasis before describing the geography of any particularly important stretch of coastline, and he concluded his summary of the 1793 season with a characteristic observation. If, he wrote, he had discovered an opening in the coast near the varying positions ascribed to 'the pretended discoveries of De Font, De Fonta or De Fuentes . . . the plausible system that has been erected, would most likely have been deemed perfect; but, unfortunately for the great ingenuity of its *hypothetical projectors*, our *practical labours* have thus far made it totter'.¹

From latitude 56° N. Vancouver sailed south to the coast of New Albion, which he surveyed, as his instructions ordered, as far as latitude 30° N. When he arrived at Monterey he found that the new Spanish commandant there was inclined to hem in the expedition with various restrictions, and he left the coast in a dudgeon to winter once again at the Sandwich Islands. The

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

ships remained there until the middle of March, and during this stay Vancouver received the cession of Hawaii from the island's king and principal chiefs, a negotiation which was never confirmed by the British government. He had already decided that the most important task of the coming season would be the exploration of Cook's River, and that the ships would sail there first, and after examining it survey the coast to the southeast until they reached the scene of their earlier explorations.

On the way north from the Sandwich Islands the ships became separated, and the *Discovery* reached Cook's River on 12 April 1794, a day before the *Chatham*. The weather on the Alaskan coast at this early season was bitterly cold, floating ice was buffeted against the ship by the tide, and some of the crew suffered from frost-bite. However, the *Discovery* safely reached Cook's old anchorage where the river branched in latitude 61°24' N., and surveying parties were sent to examine the two arms. Whidbey in the cutter made his way up the Turnagain and found it to be, not a river as Cook had supposed, but an inlet ending in a basin surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Vancouver himself explored the northern branch, and, expecting it to lead to the considerable inland navigation hinted at by Cook, and around which Pond and Dalrymple had woven their theories, was surprised to find that the navigable part of it ended only a few yards beyond the point reached by Bligh's boats sixteen years earlier. Like the eastern branch, it was an inlet, not a river, and Vancouver accordingly renamed this arm of the sea Cook's Inlet, and wrote:

Thus terminated this very extensive opening on the coast of North West America, to which, had the great and first discoverer of it, whose name it bears, dedicated one day more to its further examination, he would have spared the theoretical navigators, who have followed him in their closets, the task of ingeniously ascribing to this arm of the ocean a channel, through which a north-west passage existing according to their doctrines, might ultimately be discovered.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 125.

From the inlet the ships sailed to Prince William Sound. The Spaniards had spent six weeks exploring it in 1790, and Russian traders had since established a post there; so Vancouver's examination was something of a formality. Still, he was insistent that every part of the continental coastline between latitudes 30° N. and 60° N. should be surveyed by himself or one of his officers, and parties under Whidbey and Johnstone carefully traced the shores of the sound, including that inlet which had occasioned the dispute between Gore and Roberts on Cook's expedition, and which Goldson considered to be the Strait of Anian. Farther south, Cross Sound was discovered to be a spacious opening as Cook had described, and the indefatigable Whidbey was sent in charge of a boat party to examine it. He found that the inlet terminated in two arms, and Vancouver noted that the end of the upper one, Lynn Canal, approached closer to the lakes of the interior than any that the expedition had discovered; but between them rose the great range of mountains which had balked all the expedition's attempts to penetrate to the interior.

Finally, in the first fortnight of August, the coast between Cross Sound and latitude 56° N. was surveyed, and the explorations of 1794 linked with those of the two previous seasons. On 19 August the boats returned with their charts of this last survey; the expedition's task was finished. On board the ships the crews gave each other three cheers, an extra allowance of grog was served, and there were heartfelt celebrations during which, noted Vancouver, 'no small portion of facetious mirth passed amongst the seamen, in consequence of our having sailed from old England on the *first of April*, for the purpose of discovering a north-west passage, by following up the discoveries of De Fuca, De Fonte, and a numerous train of hypothetical navigators'.¹

The long return voyage by way of Cape Horn was comparatively uneventful, and Vancouver's main concern was to keep his crews free from scurvy. He was successful, and only one

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

man died from disease during the voyage of four and a half years. In this respect, as in many others, Vancouver was a worthy successor to Cook. Perhaps lacking the great explorer's breadth of vision, he equalled him in thoroughness and strength of purpose, and carried out a survey of unprecedented extent.¹ From the beginning, Vancouver was convinced that the reports of a great strait on the northwest coast were groundless—probably invented, he remarked on more than one occasion, to give credit to foreigners if a passage were ever found. He saw his mission, not as an attempt to find the Northwest Passage, but as one to prove decisively that it did not exist; and for the performance of this task, more wearing than spectacular, and bereft of the promise of financial reward, he was admirably suited. This exact, meticulous explorer found his satisfaction in producing charts of such accuracy that they were used for a century after his death, and were of immediate importance in that they enabled him to contradict and humiliate those theorists who in their eagerness to find a passage had impugned the achievements of James Cook. Vancouver showed that Cook's views on the geography of the Pacific coast of North America, and on the possibility of a Northwest Passage, although sometimes wrong in detail, were correct in principle. The speculative geographers of Europe were at last silenced, for Vancouver demonstrated that no waterway navigable for shipping existed between the Atlantic and Pacific in temperate latitudes.

¹ William Watson Woollen, the American naturalist who covered most of the region explored by Vancouver, wrote of him: 'His surveys of the North Pacific coast were worthy of the best explorer of any time. No other man under analogous conditions has given to the world a detailed survey of equal excellence of so many miles of intricate coast'. W. W. Woollen (ed. P. L. Haworth), *The Inside Passage to Alaska* (Cleveland, 1924), I, p. 17.

Conclusion

THE desire to find a short trade route from the Atlantic to the Pacific was the mainspring of attempts to find a Northwest Passage from the first voyage of Frobisher to the expedition of Vancouver; but when in the nineteenth century British naval explorers took up the quest they were aware that the passage they were seeking would be of little practical importance. Scientific interest, considerations of national prestige, and sheer zest for discovery then impelled the search; for the explorations of the previous century—ragged, disjointed and inept though they sometimes were—had extinguished the last hopes that the Northwest Passage might provide a route of commercial value.

The eighteenth-century expeditions which sailed in search of the passage resembled those of the earlier period in that their aim was the discovery of a route easily navigable for shipping. The incentive for the voyages was still primarily commercial, but it was more complex than hitherto, and as the dimly-known outlines of northwest America gradually became clearer the significance of the passage changed. To Knight it promised a short cut to a land of gold, to Dobbs a way to the western shores of the Americas and the lands of the north Pacific, to the Hudson's Bay Company a means by which its activities could be extended far westward, and to Dalrymple a route which would enable British merchants to command the trade of the vast region between Hudson Bay and the Pacific. Other motives also made themselves felt during this period. The Admiralty was alert to the strategic possibilities of a northern route into the Pacific, and its participation in the search for a passage was at once an indication of the government's new awareness of the importance

of maritime exploration to Britain's position as a great trading and sea power, and a sign of the increasing disinclination of individual merchants to hazard capital in expeditions which held out little prospect of immediate financial returns or monopolistic privileges. Then, too, those members of the Royal Society interested in problems of maritime discovery represented a spirit of scientific curiosity which, although exerting only a fitful influence on the course of exploration at this time, dominated it in the next century. These varying motives must all be taken into consideration; but when they are weighed and judged, it is clear that the main incentive behind the efforts to find a passage was, as in the earlier period, the material benefits and advantages which the discovery was expected to bring to the country, company, or individual.

The search in the eighteenth century was marked by a change in the direction of exploration. After the expeditions to Hudson Bay in the first half of the century failed to find a passage, the search moved from the cramped and ice-bound confines of the Bay, where the significance of discoveries had often been obscured by the conflict between the Company and its opponents, to the wide spaces of the Pacific—a region of international rather than domestic complications, where explorers had to take into account, not the attitude of the Hudson's Bay Company, but the policy of foreign governments. This shift of emphasis hastened the withdrawal of private merchants from the search, since only costly expeditions, provisioned and equipped for voyages of three or four years, could undertake the exploration of the Pacific coast of North America.

Nevertheless, the mid-century period between the expeditions of Moor and Byron was not a rupture: it was a breathing space, a pause during which the disappointments of the Hudson Bay explorers were considered and analysed, and fresh plans evolved. Vancouver, with his orders to discover a passage in temperate latitudes navigable for ocean-going vessels, was sent to find the same sort of route as Knight had sought three-quarters of a century earlier; and this continuity of the search is one of the

most impressive features of the quest in the eighteenth century. It was made possible because at the same time as a small but influential group of economists, merchants and statesmen was anxious to find a passage, geographers were confidently predicting the existence of a navigable strait in various unexplored regions.

The figures of these speculative geographers loom large behind the explorers. Their influence on the direction of maritime discovery has never been greater, and their eccentric beliefs were reflected in the instructions of every expedition sent from England in this period to find a passage. The Strait of Anian, the short passage through Roe's Welcome into the Pacific, the Río los Reyes, the channel east of Alaska to an ice-free Arctic sea, the great opening of Juan de Fuca; these were the objectives which the explorers sought, but they existed only in the imagination of the geographical theorists. Throughout the eighteenth century the search for a passage afforded a persistent contrast between the sanguine theories of geographers, and the frustrating experiences of explorers in Hudson Bay and on the northwest coast. Time and again the truth of Bougainville's bitter judgment was brought home to seamen searching in vain for the straits and passages shown on the maps: 'la Géographie est un science de faits; on n'y peut rien donner dans son cabinet à l'esprit de système, sans risquer les plus grandes erreurs qui souvent ensuite ne se corrigeant qu'aux dépens des navigateurs'.

By the end of the century disillusionment was complete, and so thorough was Vancouver's great survey that never again was the possibility of a passage in temperate latitudes seriously considered. His explorations left no hope that a strait might be found along some inadequately explored stretch of coast. They marked the end of an era; it was at last evident that for sailing ships the Northwest Passage would never provide a route of commercial or strategic value. If a passage existed, it must lie among the ice of the polar sea. Here lay both the failure and the achievement of the eighteenth-century explorers. They had not found a passage, because there was none to find where they had

searched, but at the same time as they had explored and opened for future development the long Pacific coastline from California to Bering Strait, they had defined one of the most baffling of geographical problems. Their explorations pointed the way north for the more dispassionate, scientific navigators of another generation. Where there had been uncertainty and ill-founded optimism there was finally knowledge, and a realization of the task ahead.

The Voyage of Juan de Fuca

PURCHAS printed the account of the Fuca voyage, given to him by the English merchant Michael Lok, in the fourth book of the second part of *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, published in 1625. It told how in 1596 Lok met in Venice an old Greek pilot named Juan de Fuca, who stated that he had served the Spaniards in the West Indies and South Seas for forty years, and that he had lost a great deal of money when the ship he was sailing in was captured by the Englishman, Captain Cavendish, off California. After this, he was sent by the Viceroy of Mexico as pilot on an expedition to find the Strait of Anian. The soldiers on the ships mutinied and the expedition returned without making any new discoveries, but:

shortly after the said Voyage was so ill ended, the said Viceroy of Mexico, sent him out againe Anno 1592. with a small Caravela, and a Pinnace, armed with Mariners only, to follow the said Voyage, for discovery of the same Straits of Anian, and the passage thereof, into the Sea which they call the North Sea, which is our Northwest Sea. And that he followed his course in that Voyage West and Northwest in the South Sea, all amongst the coast of Nova Spania, and California, and the Indies, now called North America (all which Voyage hee signified to me in a great Map, and a Sea-card of mine owne, which I laied before him) untill hee came to the Latitude of fortie seven degrees, and that there finding that the Land trended North and North-east, with a broad Inlet of Sea, betweene 47. and 48. degrees of Latitude: hee entred thereinto, sayling therein more then twentie dayes, and found that Land trending still sometime North-west and North-east, and North, and also East and South-eastward, and very much broader Sea then was at the said entrance, and that hee passed by divers Ilands in that sayling. And that at the entrance of this said Strait, there is on the North-west coast thereof, a great Hedland or Iland, with an exceeding high Pinacle, or spired Rocke, like a piller thereupon.

Also he said, that he went on Land in divers places, and that he saw some people on Land, clad in Beasts skins: and that the Land is very fruitfull, and rich of gold, Silver, Pearle, and other things, like Nova Spania.

And also he said, that he being entred thus farre into the said Strait, and being come into the North Sea already, and finding the Sea wide enough every where, and to be about thirtie or fortie leagues wide in the mouth of the Straits, where hee entred; he thought he had now well discharged his office, and done the thing which he was sent to doe: and that hee not being armed to resist the force of the Salvage people that might happen, hee therefore set sayle and returned homewards againe towards Nova Spania, where hee arrived at Acapulco, Anno 1592. hoping to be rewarded greatly of the Viceroy, for this service done in this said Voyage.

Also he said, that after his comming to Mexico, hee was greatly welcommmed by the Viceroy, and had great promises of great reward, but that having sued there two yeaeres time, and obtained nothing to his content, the Viceroy told him, that he should be rewarded in Spaine of the King himselfe very greatly, and willed him therefore to goe into Spaine, which Voyage hee did performe.

Also he said, that when he was come into Spaine, he was greatly welcommmed there at the Kings Court, in wordes after the Spanish manner, but after long time of suite there also, hee could not get any reward there neither to his content. And that therefore at the length he stole out of Spaine, and came into Italie, to goe home againe and live among his owne Kindred and Countrimen, he being very old.

Also he said, that hee thought the cause of his ill reward had of the Spaniards, to bee for that they did understand very well, that the English Nation had now given over all their voyages for discoverie of the North-west passage, wherefore they need not feare them any more to come that way into the South Sea, and therefore they needed not his service therein any more.¹

Modern research² has shown that there was a Greek pilot

¹ Purchas, *Pilgrimes* (1906 edn.), XIV, pp. 416-17.

² A scholarly examination of the Fuca account by two Spanish historians is to be found in D. M. F. de Navarrete and D. E. F. de Navarrete, 'Examen Histórico-Crítico de los Viajes y Descubrimientos Apócrifos del Capitán Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado, de Juan de Fuca y del Almirante Bartolomé de Fonte'. Printed in D. M. Salvá and D. P. S. de Baranda (eds.), *Collección de Documentos*

named Juan de Fuca serving in Mexico between 1588 and 1594, and it is possible that he was engaged on exploration in that period. No expedition, however, reached as far north as latitude 48° N., and whether the story printed by Purchas was invented by Lok, or whether the merchant was himself beguiled in Venice by a hard-luck story from the old pilot (who was doubtless aware of the keen English interest in the Northwest Passage) has never been determined. An interesting sidelight on the subject is to be found in the *Naval Tracts* of Admiral Monson. These were written about 1610, but were not published until 1704, and they were probably unknown to Purchas when he printed the Lok account. A story given in the *Naval Tracts* seems to show that Lok had indeed met Fuca, but that the merchant, who was forever trying to obtain support for voyages of exploration, had later added an entirely imaginary voyage to the account given him by the pilot. Monson maintained that the Pacific entrance of the Northwest Passage did not lie as far south as many geographers believed, and he wrote:

But for better Satisfaction to this Point, I will lay open a later Proof, known to divers Englishmen yet living, that were with Mr. Cavendish in his Glorious Voyage about the World in 1586. After he had passed the Streights of Magellan, and the Coast of Chile, Peru, and New-Spain, he came to California, where he took his rich Prize of 700 Tuns of China Silks, coming from the Phillipine Islands, bound for the Port of Navidad in New Spain: This Ship had in her 190 Passengers; and after he had laden his own Ships with her Merchandise, he burnt both Ship and Goods, not being able to carry her with him; and for the Men he put ashore at Cape California, from whence they travell'd by Land as far as the Port of Navidad, whither they were bound by Sea.

In their Way they pass'd many Indian Countries, not commonly known to the Spaniards before; in all which Travel they found no Interruption, by Streight, River, or other Let of Water, fresh or

Inéditos para La Historia de España, XV (Madrid, 1849), pp. 102-33. The best discussions of the voyage in English are in H. H. Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast 1543-1800* (San Francisco, 1884); and Wagner, 'Apocryphal Voyages', *Proceedings of American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, LXI, pp. 184-90.

salt: And for the Proof of their safe Arrival at the Port of Navidad aforesaid, besides the Relation I have seen of it, it happened that many years after, a Pilot of the said Prize taken by Mr. Cavendish, and a Greek by Nation, returning into his Country, after 20 years spent abroad, happen'd into the Company of one Mr. Lock, an Englishman, in Italy, with whom he grew acquainted, and related to him all the Particulars of his Voyage, as well what happen'd by Sea as by Land, after Mr. Cavendish's putting them ashore.¹

The version of the account given to Purchas by Lok apparently attracted little attention at the time of publication, and did not become well known until the middle of the eighteenth century. Interest in the supposed voyage only became marked when explorers began searching for a passage along the northwest coast of America; and when an opening was discovered within a degree of the latitude of the strait described in Lok's account, it was almost inevitable that it should be named after the Greek mariner, who had probably never sailed within fifteen hundred miles of the region.

¹ Awnsham and John Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 704), III, p. 432.

The Fonte Letter

The Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious, in which the Fonte letter was originally printed, was a periodical edited by James Petiver which made its first appearance in January 1707. It was by no means a collection of trivialities: its contents varied from observations on the origin of English laws to an account of the conversion of Muscovites from the Greek church, from translations of discourses delivered to the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris to a description of the nature and habits of crustaceans. A recent biography of Petiver¹ briefly mentions the short-lived career of *The Monthly Miscellany*, but throws no new light on the source of the Fonte letter, although it shows that Petiver had correspondents in most countries of the world. In the rendering of the text given below about one-sixth of the letter (dealing with the expedition's progress from Lima to California) has been omitted. Apart from this, the account, with its abysmally bad style and grammer, is reproduced as it appeared in 1708. What appear to be editorial annotations, originally placed in the margin, have been appended as footnotes.

The Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious

APRIL

A Letter from Admiral Bartholomew de Fonte, then Admiral of New Spain and Peru, and now Prince of Chili; giving an Account of the most material Transactions in a Journal of his from the Calo of Lima in Peru, on his Discoveries to find out if there was any North West Passage from the Atlantick Ocean into the South and Tartarian Sea.

¹ R. Stearns, *James Petiver, Promoter of Natural Science* (Worcester, Mass., 1953).

The Viceroy of New Spain and Peru, having advice from the Court of Spain, that the several Attempts of the English, both in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and of Capt. Hudson and Capt. James, in the 2^d, 3^d and 4th Years of King Charles, was in the 14th Year of the said King Charles, A.D. 1639, undertaken from some Industrious Navigators from Boston in New England, upon which I Admiral de Fonte received Orders from Spain and the Viceroy to Equip four Ships of Force, and being ready we put to Sea the 3^d of April 1640. from the Calo of Lima, I Admiral Bartholomew de Fonte in the Ship St. Spiritus, the Vice-Admiral Don Diego Pennelossa, in the Ship St. Lucia, Pedro de Bonardae, in the Ship Rosario, Philip de Ronquillo in the King Philip Admiral de Fonte with the other 3 Ships sailed from them within the Islands Chamilly the 10th of May 1640. and having the length of Cape Abel, on the W.S.W. side of California in 26 Degrees of N. Latitude, 160 Leagues N.W. and W. from the Isles Chamilly; the Wind sprung up at S.S.E. a steady Gale, that from the 26th of May to the 14th of June, he had sail'd to the River los Reyes in 53 Degrees of N. Latitude, not having occasion to lower a Topsail, in sailing 866 Leagues N.N.W. 410 Leagues from Port Abel to Cape Blanco, 456 Leagues to Rioles Reyes, all the time most pleasant weather, and sailed about 260 Leagues in crooked Channels, amongst Islands named the¹ Archipelagus de St. Lazarus; where his Ships Boats always sail'd a mile a head, sounding to see what Water, Rocks and Sands there was.

The 22^d of June, Admiral Fonte dispatch'd one of his Captains to Pedro de Barnarda to sail up a fair River, a gentle Stream and deep Water, went first N. and N.E.N. and N.W. into a large Lake full of Islands, and one very large Peninsula full of Inhabitants, a Friendly honest People in this Lake; he named Lake Valasco, where Capt. Barnarda left his Ship; nor all up the River was less than 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 fathom Water, both the Rivers and Lakes abounding with Salmon Trout, and very large white Pearch, some of them two foot long; and with 3 large Indian Boats, by them called Periagos, made of two large Trees 50 and 60 foot long. Capt. Barnarda first sailed from his Ships in the Lake Velasco, one hundred and forty Leagues West, and then 436 E.N.E. to 77 Degrees of Latitude.

Admiral de Fonte, after he had dispatch'd Captain Barnarda on the Discovery of the North and East part of the Tartarian Sea, the Admiral sail'd up a very Navigable River, which he named Rioles

¹ So named by de Fonte, he being the first that made that Discovery.

Reyes, that run nearest North East, but on several Points of the Compass 60 Leagues at low Water, in a fair Navigable Channel, not less than 4 or 5 Fathom Water. It flow'd in both Rivers near the same Water, in the River los Reyes, 24 foot Full and Change of the Moon; a S.S.E. Moon made high Water. It flow'd in the River de Haro 22 foot and a half Full and Change. They had two¹ Jesuits with them that had been on their Mission to the 66 Degrees of North Latitude, and had made curious Observations. The Admiral de Fonte received a Letter from Captain Barnarda, dated the 27th of June, 1640. that he had left his Ship in the Lake Valasco, betwixt the Island Barnarda and the Peninsula Conihasset, a very safe Port; it went down a River from the Lake, 3 Falls, 80 Leagues, and fell into the Tartarian Sea in 61 Degrees, with the Pater Jesuits and 36 Natives in three of their Boats, and 20 of his Spanish Seamen; that the Land trended a way North East; that they should want no Provisions, the Country abounding with Venison of 3 sorts, and the Sea and Rivers with excellent Fish (Bread, Salt, Oyl and Brandy they carry'd with them) that he should do what was possible. The Admiral, when he received the Letter from Captain Barnarda, was arrived at an Indian Town called Conosset, on the South-side the Lake Belle, where the two Pater Jesuits on their Mission had been two Years; a peasant [sic] Place. The Admiral with his two Ships, enter'd the Lake the 22^d of June, an Hour before high Water, and there was no Fall or Catract, and 4 or 5 Fathom Water, and 6 or 7 Fathom generally in the Lake Belle, there is a little fall of Water till half Flood, and an Hour and quarter before high Water the Flood begins to set gently into the Lake Belle; the River is fresh at 20 Leagues distance from the Mouth, or Entrance of the River los Reyes. The River and Lake abounds with Salmon, Salmon-Trouts, Pikes, Perch and Mullets, and two other sorts of Fish peculiar to that River, admirable good, and Lake Belle; also abounds with all those sorts of Fish large and delicate; and Admiral de Fonte says, the Mullets catch'd in Rios Reyes and Lake Belle, are much delicater than are to be found, he believes, in any part of the World.

JUNE

We concluded with giving an Account of a Letter from Capt. Barnarda, dated the 27th of June, 1640. on his Discovery in the Lake Valasco. The first of July 1640, Admiral de Fonte sailed from the rest of his Ships in the Lake Belle, in a good Port cover'd by a fine Island,

¹ One of those that went with Capt. Barnarda on his Discovery.

before the Town Conosset from thence to a River I named Parmentiers, in honour of my Industrious Judicious Comrade, Mr Parmentiers, who had most exactly mark'd every thing in and about that River; we pass'd 8 Falls, in all 32 foot, perpendicular from its Sourse out of Belle; it falls into the large Lake I named Lake de Fonte, at which place we arrived the 6th of July. This Lake is 160 Leagues long and 60 broad, the Length is E.N.E. and W.S.W. to 20 or 30, in some places 60 Fathom deep; the Lake abounds with excellent Cod and Ling, very large and well fed, there are several very large Islands and 10 small ones; they are covered with shrubby Woods, the Moss grows 6 or 7 foot long, with which the Moose, a very large sort of Deer, are fat with in the Winter, and other lesser Deer, as Fallow, &c. There are abundance of wild Cherries, Strawberries, Hurtle-berries, and wild Currants, and also of wild Fowl, Heath Cocks and Hens, likewise Partridges and Turkeys, and Sea Fowl in great plenty on the South side: The Lake is a very large fruitful Island, had a great many Inhabitants, a very excellent Timber, as Oaks, Ashes, Elm and Fur-Trees, very large and tall.

The 14th of July we sailed out of the E.N.E. end of the Lake de Fonte, and pass'd a Lake I named Estricho de Ronquillo, 34 Leagues long, 2 or 3 Leagues broad, 20, 26, and 28 Fathom of Water; we pass'd this strait in 10 hours, having a stout Gale of Wind and whole Ebb. As we sailed more Easterly, the Country grew very sensibly worse, as it is in the North and South parts of America, from 36 to the extream Parts North and South, the West differs not only in Fertility but in Temperature of Air, at least 10 Degrees, and it is warmer on the West side than on the East, as the best Spanish Discoverers found it, whose business it was in the time of the Emperor Charles the V. to Phillip the III. as is noted by Alcares and a Costa and Mariana, &c.

The 17th we came to an Indian Town, and the Indians told our Interpreter Mr Parmentiers, that a little way from us lay a great Ship where there had never been one before; we sailed to them, and found only one Man advanced in years, and a Youth; the Man was the greatest Man in the Mechanical Parts of the Mathematicks I had ever met with; my second Mate was a English Man, an excellent Seaman, as was my Gunner, who had been taken Prisoners at Campechy, as well as the Master's Son; they told me the Ship was of New England, from a Town called Boston. The Owner and the whole Ships Company came on board the 30th, and the Navigator of the Ship. Capt. Shap-

ley, told me, his Owner was a fine Gentleman, and Major General of the largest Colony in New England, called the Mastechusets; so I received him like a Gentleman, and told him, my Commission was to make Prize of any People seeking a North West or West Passage into the South Sea, but I would look upon them as Merchants trading with the Natives for Bevers, Otters, and other Furs and Skins, and so for a small Present of Provisions I had no need on, I gave him my Diamond Ring, which cost me 1200 Pieces of Eight, (which the modest Gentleman received with difficulty) and having given the brave Navigator, Cap. Shapley for his fine Charts and Journals, 1000 Pieces of Eight, and the Owner of the Ship, Scimor Gibbons a quarter Cask of good Peruan Wine, and the 10 Seamen each 20 Pieces of Eight, the 6th of August, with as much Wind as we could fly before, and a Currant, we arrived at the first Fall of the River Parmentiers, the 11th of August, 86 Leagues, and was on the South Side of the Lake Belle on board our Ships the 16th of August, before the fine Town Conosset, where we found all things well; and the honest Natives of Conosett had in our absence treated our People with great humanity, and Capt. de Ronquillo answer'd their Civility and Justice.

The 20th of August an Indian brought me a Letter to Conosset on the Lake Belle, from Capt. Barnarda, dated the 11th of August, where he sent me word he was returned from his Cold Expedition, and did assure me there was no Communication out of the Spanish or Atlantick Sea, by Davis Strait; for the Natives had conducted one of his Seaman to the head of Davis Strait, which terminated in a fresh Lake of about 30 Mile in circumference, in the 80th Degree of North Latitude; and that there was prodigious Mountains North of it, besides the North West from that Lake, the Ice was so fix'd, that from the Shore to 100 Fathom Water, for ought he knew from the Creation; for Mankind knew little of the wonderful Works of God, especially near the North and South Poles; he writ further, that he had sailed from Basset Island North East, and East North East, and North East and by East, to the 79th Degree of Latitude, and then the Land trended North, and the Ice rested on the Land. I received afterwards a second Letter from Capt. Barnarda, dated from Minhanset, informing me, that he made the Port of Arena, 20 Leagues up the River los Reyes the 29th of August, where he waited my Commands. I having store of good Salt Provisions, of Venison and Fish, that Capt. de Ronquillo had salted (by my order) in my absence, and 100 Hogsheads of Indian Wheat or Mais, sailed the 2^d of September 1640. accompanied with many of the honest Natives of

Conosset, and the 5th of September in the Morning about 8, was at an Anchor betwixt Arena and Mynhanset, in the River los Reyes, sailing down that River to the North East part of the South Sea; after that returned home, having found that there was no Passage into the South Sea by that they call the North West Passage. The Chart will make this much more demonstrable.

Tho the Style of the foregoing Piece is not altogether so Polite, (being writ like a Man, whose livelihood depended on another way) but with abundance of Experience and a Traveller, yet there are so many Curious, and hitherto unknown Discoveries, that it was thought worthy of a place in these Memoirs; and 'this humbly presum'd it will not be unacceptable to those who have either been in those Parts, or will give themselves the trouble of reviewing the Chart.

FINIS¹

¹ James Petiver (ed.), *The Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious* (London, 1708), pp. 123–6, 183–6. Despite the editor's reference, no map was published with the letter.

Bibliography

AN exhaustive bibliography of a subject touching so many diverse fields as the search for the Northwest Passage in the eighteenth century would run to an inordinate length. This bibliography is therefore limited to the most important documents, maps and books used, and does not include all those cited in the footnotes.

I. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

A. PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

(i) *ADMIRALTY*

Logs and journals for the naval discovery expeditions are contained in the Adm 51/ and Adm 55/ series:

Middleton Expedition. Adm 51/290 Pt. IX (Moor), /379 Pts. I-III (Middleton).

Baffin Bay Expeditions. Adm 51/540, Pt. VII (Pickersgill), Pt. VIII (Young).

Cook Expedition. Adm 55/112 (Cook), /120 (Gore), /122 (King).

Vancouver Expedition. Adm 55/17, 27 (both Puget).

Also used were the following volumes of:

Captains' Letters. Adm 1/1610, 1612, 2099, 2100, 2105.

Letters from Secretaries of State. Adm 1/4154-4156.

Orders and Instructions. Adm 2/57, 98, 101, 1332.

Out-Letters: Lords of Admiralty. Adm 2/202, 243.

Out-Letters: Secretary. Adm 2/473, 479, 480, 733, 736.

Admiralty Board Minutes. Adm 3/45, 47, 79, 107.

(ii) *COLONIAL OFFICE*

C.O.5/187 contains instructions to Vancouver, and dispatches from him while on the northwest coast of America. The following volumes in the Canada: Quebec series contain correspondence and memoranda regarding the fur trade and proposed discoveries in northwest America between 1784 and 1792: C.O.42/21, 47, 66, 72, 317.

B. HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY ARCHIVES

Minute Books. A 1/33-43. These record the decisions taken by the Committee, and by any sub-committees set up to consider particular subjects. The rough minute books (A 1/117-122) help to fill the gaps where the minute books are missing.

Correspondence Books Outwards: HBC Official. A 6/3-10. These volumes contain the annual letters and instructions sent by the Committee to the Company posts, and also sailing orders to the Company captains. They are complete for the period under study, and have been used extensively.

Inward Correspondence from Churchill. A 11/13-15. The letters received each year from the Bay posts are filed in separate volumes. Those containing correspondence from the farthest north of the Company's posts at Churchill have been found most useful, and include material about the discovery expeditions which left Churchill in this period.

Churchill Journals and Correspondence. B 42/a/1-117, B 42/b/1a, 6, 8. One of the Committee's most insistent directives was that the factor at each post should keep a daily journal, and send it to England by the yearly ship. The journals of the factor at Churchill are complete from 1721 onwards, and after 1750 there is also an almost complete series of logs of the trading sloops attached to the post. The B 42/b/ series contains correspondence between the factor at Churchill and factors at the other Bay posts.

York Journals and Correspondence. B 239/a/1-3, 5, 27. B 239/b/1-4. The journals kept by Knight at York are exceptionally detailed. The correspondence books of his successor, Kelsey, contain instructions regarding expeditions to the north, and minutes of councils held at York. Volumes from the period when Moor's discovery vessels wintered at York have also been found useful.

The following miscellaneous volumes from other series have also been used:

Correspondence Books Outwards: General Series. A 5/1, 3. The first volume contains letters from the Committee to Moses Norton, and the second, Company correspondence with the Admiralty and East India Company at the time of the Duncan expedition.

Inward Correspondence from York. A 11/114. Contains letters from Knight, Kelsey and Isham.

Inward Correspondence: General. A 10/1. Contains some of Duncan's correspondence with the Committee.

Account Books. A 14/7, A 15/6-7. Contain details of the cost of the Knight expedition.

Ships' Logs. C 1/204, 205. Are the journals kept by Taylor, mate of the *Beaver* brig under Duncan in 1791-2.

Ships' Miscellaneous Papers. C 7/13, 175. Contain orders and memoranda about the Duncan and Dixon expeditions.

'Observations on Hudson's Bay'. E 2/4, 7, 9, 12. These are manuscript volumes written by Andrew Graham, clerk and later factor in the Bay, which contain much valuable material about the expeditions north from Churchill in the 1760's. There are also references to the Dobbs crisis.

The Arthur Dobbs Folder. A mass of material from the period of Dobbs' attack on the Company, formerly known as the Arthur Dobbs Folder, has been classified as: E 18/1, which includes two copies of the Dobbs memorial of 1733, and transcripts of evidence given before the Law Officers in 1748, and before the Parliamentary Committee in 1749; and E 18/2, a contemporary copy of Francis Smith's log of the *California* 1746-7.

C. BRITISH MUSEUM

Add.MSS. contain the journal of Lt. James Burney 1776-9 (8955); the logs, journals and observations of Lt. Peter Puget 1790-5 (17,542-17,551); and the journal of Archibald Menzies 1790-4 (32,641).

Eg.MSS. contain Cook's journal and instructions 1776-9 (2177A and 2177B); letters from Barrington to Douglas concerning explorations in northwest America 1788-92 (2185-6); and the journal of David Samwell 1776-9 (2591).

D. THE ROYAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Volume VI of the Minutes of the Council contains copies of letters from Daines Barrington proposing discovery expeditions to the North Pole and the northwest coast of America, and the Council's decisions on these matters. The present writer is grateful to the Royal Society for permission to quote from this volume.

E. THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

A microfilm of letters from the Sandwich Papers at Mapperton relating to Cook's third voyage has been deposited at the National Maritime Museum. The letters, which are not numbered in any way, include several from Barrington to Lord Sandwich concerning Cook's third voyage and the 1775 Parliamentary bill offering a reward for the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Other documents used were: ADM/B/114 which contains correspondence between the Admiralty and Navy Board about the Middleton expedition; and ADM L/F/109 Lt. John Rankin's log of the *Furnace* 1741-2.

F. EAST INDIA COMPANY ARCHIVES

Documents in the archives of the East India Company (now part of the India Office Library) concerning expeditions to the northwest coast of America 1785-92 have been conveniently gathered into one volume, Home Series, Misc. 494/5. The volume includes minutes of the Court of Directors of the Company, petitions from Richard Cadman Etches, and several memoranda by Alexander Dalrymple. The journal of James Strange 1785-6, entitled 'A Narrative of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America', is in Home Series, Misc. 800/1, pp. 1-145.

G. THE CASTLE WARD PAPERS

The Castle Ward Papers, which are in the possession of the Earl of Bangor at Castle Ward, Downpatrick, County Down, comprise a set of volumes containing letters and documents of the Ward (later Bangor) family. There are a number of letters from Arthur Dobbs to Judge Michael Ward in the collection, and photostat copies of these were loaned to the present writer by Mr Desmond Clarke, Librarian of the Royal Dublin Society.

H. THE DARTMOUTH PAPERS

One volume among the Dartmouth Papers at the William Salt Library, Stafford (D 1778) contains correspondence and memoranda relating to northern exploration between 1772 and 1774. Mr R. A. Skelton kindly allowed the present writer to inspect and copy photostats of these documents made for the Hakluyt Society.

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IV. MAPS

Unless otherwise stated, the maps listed below are to be found in the Map Room of the British Museum. Sections of maps marked with an asterisk have been copied, and are reproduced in this volume. The original spelling of names and legends on the maps has been retained, although for reasons of clarity some of the wording and inland detail on the original maps has been omitted. Longitudes have been standardized, and are shown west of London.

*1704 JOHN THORNTON. *Chart of the north part of America. For Hudson's Bay, commonly called North-West Passage.*

*1708 J. B. NOLIN. *Globe Terrestre.*

*c. 1710 J. SENEX, C. PRICE, J. MAXWELL. *North America.*

*1725 J. SENEX. *North America.*

*1743 CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON. *Chart of Hudson's Bay and Straits, Baffin's Bay, Strait Davis and Labrador Coast.*

1745 JOHANNES VAN KEULEN. *Noord-Oceaen.*

*1746 JOHN WIGATE. *Chart of the Seas, Straits, &c. thro' which his Majesty's Sloop 'Furnace' pass'd for discovering a Passage from Hudson's Bay to the South Sea.*

1747 EMANUEL BOWEN. *A New and Accurate Map of the North Pole.*

1748 [T. S. DRAGE]. *A Chart for the better understanding of De Font's Letter.*

HENRY ELLIS. *A Chart of the Coast where a North West Passage was attempted 1746-7.*

*1749 [T. S. DRAGE]. *A Chart of Hudson's Straits and Bay According to the Discoveries made in the Years 1746 and 1747.*

1751 J. N. BELLIN. *Carte Réduite des Mers du Nord.*

*1752 PHILIPPE BUACHE. *Carte des Nouvelles Découvertes au Nord de la Mer du Sud.* (Frontispiece).

* J. N. DE L'ISLE. *Carte Generale des Découvertes de l'Amiral de Fonte et autres Navigateurs Espagnols, Anglois et Russes, pour le recherche du Passage a la Mer du Sud.*

1753 PHILIPPE BUACHE. *Carte des Nouvelles Découvertes entre la Partie Oriente de l'Asie et l'Occidente de l'Amérique.*

JOHN GREEN. *A New Chart of North and South America.*

1755 J. N. BELLIN. *Carte de l'Amérique Septentrionale.*

1757 ROBERT DE VAUGONDY. *Amérique Septentrionale.*

*1758 G. MÜLLER. *Nouvelles Cartes des Découvertes faites par des Vaisseaux Russiens aux Cotes inconnues de l'Amérique avec les pais adiacents.*

1760 MOSES NORTON. MS. map of rivers between Prince of Wales Fort and the northern copper-mine. From Indian information (HBC G 1/19).

MS. map of the northern parts of Hudson Bay. From Indian information (HBC G 2/8).

*1767 MS. Map of Hudson Bay and northwest America. From Indian information, and endorsed 'Captain Mea to nabee and I dot ly azees, Draught' (HBC G 2/27).

1769 [ALEXANDER CLUNIE]. *A Map of North and South America . . . By the American Traveller.*

*1774 J. VON STÄHLIN. *A Map of the New Northern Archipelago discover'd by the Russians in the Seas of Kamtschatka and Anadir.*

1784 HENRY ROBERTS. *Chart of the N.W. coast of America and the N.E. coast of Asia explored in the years 1778 and 1779. Prepared by Lieut. Henry Roberts under the immediate inspection of Capt. Cook.*

1785 PETER POND. MS. map of northwest America (printed in Davidson, *North West Company*, p. 32).

*1787 MS. map of northwest America and the north Pacific (C.O. 700/America/49). Dated 'Araubaska' 6 Dec. 1787.

1789 ALEXANDER DALRYMPLE. *A Map of the Lands around the North-Pole* (C.O. 700/America/50).

1790 CHARLES DUNCAN. *Sketch of the Entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. 15th August 1788.*
Simplified version of 1787 Pond map, in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LX (Mar. 1790), p. 197.

JOHN MEARES. *A Chart of the Northern Pacific Ocean, Containing the N.E. Coast of Asia and N.W. Coast of America, Explored in 1778 and 1779, by Captain Cook, and further Explored in 1788 and 1789, by John Meares.*
A Chart of the Interior Part of North America Demonstrating the very great probability of an Inland Navigation from Hudsons Bay to the West Coast.

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The names of capes, lakes, rivers and ships are entered under those four headings. The following abbreviations are used: H.B.C. for Hudson's Bay Company, N.W. for Northwest or northwest, N. for North or north, etc.

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DR GLYNDWR WILLIAMS read History at the London School of Economics and graduated in 1954 with First Class Honours. In 1958 he shared the Royal Commonwealth Society's Walter Frewen Lord Prize for his research work on James Cook's third voyage and in 1959 was awarded a Ph.D. from London University. He is now Assistant Lecturer in History at Queen Mary College, University of London.

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